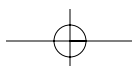


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WHAT IS INDYMEDIA?

With autonomous chapters in more than 150 cities throughout the world, the Independent Media Center is an international network of volunteer media activists.

The IMC seeks to create a new media ethic by providing progressive, in-depth and accurate coverage of issues. We are a community-based organization using media to facilitate political and cultural self-representation. We seek to analyze issues affecting individuals, communities and ecosystems by providing media tools and space to those seeking to communicate. We espouse open dialogue and placing the means of communication and creativity back in the hands of the people, away from the drive of profit.

The Independent is funded by benefits, subscriptions, donations, grants and ads from organizations and individuals with similar missions.

WHAT CAN I DO TO GET INVOLVED?

The IMC has an open door. You can write and distribute for *The Independent*, videotape events and rallies, update the website, self-publish articles to the web, take photos or just help us run the office. As an organization relying on volunteer support, we encourage all forms of participation.

The print team reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity. We welcome your participation in the entire editorial process.

VOLUNTEER STAFF:

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

january

Please send event announcements to indyevents@gmail.com.

ONGOING:

JAN 5 – FEB 16

\$10/\$7.50 for students/seniors
ANTIWAR FILM FESTIVAL presented by The War Resisters League and the Brecht Forum. The Brecht Forum 451 West St. 212-242-4201 • brechtforum.org

SAT JAN 13 – MON JAN 15

Time TBA • Free
ACTION: ECONOMIC BOYCOTT AGAINST POLICE KILLINGS. Sponsored by the People's Organization for Progress (POP). Unslaved@aol.com • Visit njpop.org

SAT JAN 13

8pm • \$5, students, vets, parolees and punks; \$10, people with jobs
MUSIC: RADICAL FOLKSINGER DAVID ROVICS, punk rock provocateur Randy Nerve and Laura Seivling, singer/songwriter. Vox Pop, 1022 Cortelyou Road, Ditmas Park, Brooklyn, 718-940-2084 • voxpopnet.net

SUN JAN 14

3:30PM • Free
“LOOKING FOR MARTIN: ARE DR. KING AND HIS 'DREAM' STILL RELEVANT?” Sponsored by WNYC, New York Public Radio, in conjunction with The Brooklyn Museum and Akila Worksongs, Inc. 212-669-3333 • www.wnyc.org/events/

1 – 3pm • Free
PROTEST: FUR PROTEST SPONSORED BY CARING ACTIVISTS AGAINST FUR. Antonovich Furs, 125 Rte. 46 W , NJ. Contact Julie, 201-927- 3617, info@caafgroup.com • caafgroup.com

MON JAN 15

4pm – 6:00pm • Free
NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION: TROOPS OUT NOW COALITION IN SPECIAL RECOGNITION OF MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.'S BIRTHDAY. Guest speaker Charles Barron. Times Square Recruiting Station at 43rd and Broadway. 212-633-6646 • TroopsOutNow.org

TUES JAN 16

7pm • Free
DISCUSSION: “JUST BETWEEN YOU AND ME AND THE NSA?” A Town Hall meeting on domestic spying, NSA surveillance and rule of law with moderator Claudia Angelos, NYU School of Law, Rep. Jerrold Nadler, Democrat-NY, Chair. NYU Law School, Lipton Hall, 212-607-3358 • arosmarin@nyclu.org

7:00pm • Free
MESSAGE FOR THE BLACK COMMUNITY TODAY
Celebrating the life of Dr King. At Plainfield Public Library, Park Ave. at 8th St, Plainfield, NJ. Sponsor: POP Plainfield Branch. Info: Steve Hatcher, 908-753-5273.

WED JAN 17

8:30am – 10:00am
PRESS CONFERENCE: JEWS & NON-JEWS CALL FOR END OF ISRAEL'S SIEGE OF GAZA, RESPECT FOR PALESTINIANS. At steps of Mt Hope AME Zion Church, 65 Lake St, White Plains, NY. RSVP/info: Michael Sussman, 845-294-3991, Sussman1@frontiernet.net

11am – 1pm • Free
CITYWIDE CONVENTION ON TENANT HARASSMENT. W/MAKE THE ROAD BY WALKING. At Judson Memorial Church, 55 Washington Sq South Sponsor: Assn for Neighborhood & Housing Development (membership organization of NYC nonprofit neighborhood housing groups). www.anhd.org

7pm • Free
MEETING: CIVIL WAR, OCCUPATION & RESISTANCE: THE CASE FOR IMMEDIATE WITHDRAWAL
16 Beaver Group, International Socialist Organization, 16 Beaver St., 5th Floor, between Whitehall and Broad St., on the corner of Beaver and New St. 646-452-8631 • nyciso@hotmail.com

THURS JAN 18

7:30pm • Free, \$6 w/supper
FILM/ DISCUSSION: “LISTEN UP! : NEW VOICES FOR REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE,” a film by N'Dieye Gray Danavall. Sponsored by Radical Women, Danavall's video showing commemorates Roe vs. Wade.

At Freedom Hall, 113 W. 128th St., between Malcolm X and Adam Clayton Powell Blvds. Childcare available. 212-222-0633 • fsprw@nycnet • radical-women.org

SAT JAN 20

9am – 5pm • Free (donations accepted)
CONFERENCE: “BREAKING THE SILENCE: THE GRASSROOTS SPEAKS.” The People's Peace Conference on the U.S. War in Iraq & Our Communities. Call to register. Rutgers School of Law, Newark, NJ, 123 Washington St. • 973-801-0001

SUN JAN 21

2 – 6:30pm • Free
SIXTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE NEW YORK METRO ALLIANCE OF ANARCHISTS
Sixth St Community Center, 638 E 6th St. • nymaa.org

MON JAN 22

6 – 8pm • \$7-\$15
THE PRINCE MYSHKINS, POLITICAL SATIRE/FOLK MUSIC. Benefit for the War Resisters League. The Bowery Poetry Club, 308 Bowery St. • warresisters.org 212.228.0450

7:30 & 9:30pm • Free
MEETING/ACTION: FREEGAN MEETING & TRASH TOUR. 7:30: plan upcoming freegan events and outreach. 9:30: take a tour of neighborhood's wasted food and other items. Meet at Regale's Deli rear seating area. 5th Ave btwn 15th & 16th Sts. freegan.info • 347-724-6954

TUE JAN 23

8:30am • Free
COURT SUPPORT FOR FR. LUIS BARRIOS
100 Centre Street. Lucia Bruno 212-926-5757 or un16defense@yahoo.com

WED JAN 24

6:30 – 9:30pm • Free
MEET THE CANDIDATES FOR THE 40TH CITY COUNCIL DISTRICT SPECIAL ELECTION. Candidates and Panelists will be in attendance. Vox Pop, 1022 Cortelyou Rd., Brooklyn. voxpopnet.net • 718-940-2084

7pm • \$8/free w/School ID
DISCUSSION: “HUMANITY AND TORTURE,” the power of the media in shaping ideas about the acceptability of torture. Lang Center, 55 W 13th St, 2nd Fl. Tix: New School Box Office 66 W 12th St. 212-229-5353 • boxoffice@newschool.edu

SAT JAN 27

ALL DAY • Free
MARCH ON WASHINGTON: TO CONGRESS AND THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION: END THE WAR AND OCCUPATION IN IRAQ AND BRING THE TROOPS HOME NOW. Location to be announced in DC. Sponser: United for Peace and Justice. 212-868-5545 • unitedforpeace.org

MON JAN 29

3pm • Free
RALLY: MOBILIZATION AGAINST POLICE BRUTALITY AND RACISM. UN Dag Hammarskjold Plaza (47th St Btwn 1st & 2nd Ave). December 12th Movement, D12M@aol.com • 718-398-1766

TUE JAN 30

7pm • \$3 – \$5 suggested
WOMEN'S POETRY JAM AND WOMEN'S OPEN MIKE featuring Hadassah Hill and Suzanne Rae Deshchidn. Bluestockings Books • 172 Allen Street. 212-777-6028 • www.bluestockings.com

TUESDAY JAN. 23

7pm

open house

at
*THE
INDYPENDENT*
4 West 43rd Street
Suite 311

ALL ARE WELCOME!

Refreshments served,
Screening of
The Independent the film

letters to the editor

First person article in the Dec. 13 issue of *The Independent* (“Return from the Killing Fields: NYC Woman Confronts Her Brother's Actions in Iraq”) about a sister's anguish over the atrocities her brother participated in in Iraq touched a nerve with our readers and was fiercely debated on indypendent.org.

UNSPEAKABLE

What your brother did is unspeakable (and worse, he views it as entertainment for his friends) and the fact that it is a war does not make it excusable.

—ANG

COMPLICITY

Society didn't force him to become a torturer or a murderer. You are currently complicit in war crimes. Unless you take immediate steps to prevent future atrocities, you will share responsibility for them.

—NIGHTWALKER

"FAMILY IS WAY MORE IMPORTANT"

Here you people are, like a bunch of jackasses, showing your fake-as-hell empathy for the tortured Iraqis and being complete DICKS to someone with a real dilemma, who supported the war as little as you did. You just want to hang her out to dry so you can see her videos on tv and yell and scream about how right you were that the American military is running Iraq like a fascist regime. I sat there and read that damn compelling story and almost fell out of my chair when I saw some of the stuff you people were saying. You should fucking be ashamed of yourself. You're all equally as huge, self-righteous, egocentric jackasses as the far right. Family is way more important than any fucking war.

—WOW

MY BROTHER IS ALSO A MARINE

I wanted to write and thank you for your thoughtful piece “Return from the Killing Fields.” It is uncanny how much your experience seems to mirror mine – I also am strongly opposed to the Iraq war and have a brother who is a demo expert

in the Marine Corps. He recently embarked on his second tour in Iraq, and the hardships and conflicts suffered by myself and my family members are difficult to communicate even to my closest friends. Your struggle to maintain a close relationship with your brother and your aborted attempts at forgiveness spoke to my own difficulties.

—APPRECIATIVE

WHAT ABOUT THE IRAQI'S SISTER?

It must be a painful position to be with a brother that you love who has committed a brutal crime. War crimes are a complicated, mind-numbing, ignored subject, but you say this man [your brother] filmed and photographed the torture and death of others and took part. Don't the victims' families also deserve compassion, justice, support? Maybe that young man who was brutalized had a sister too.

—QUESTION

letters are continued on page 14

Why I Joined the Vigil for Sean Bell

A LETTER FROM AN ACTIVIST

BY KEVIN POWELL

Last night I was out at the 50-day Sean Bell Vigil in Jamaica, Queens, across from the 103rd Precinct. In spite of the rain, the Bell family, friends and folks looking for basic justice were there. It was incredibly moving. It made me think of Rosa Parks in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955, as well as the lunch counter sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1960. In both instances, it was just a few dedicated individuals and their very simple acts of civil disobedience that brought attention to very serious human and civil rights violations. They made sacrifices of their own comfort and their own safety, and changes did happen, as manifested in the civil rights movement.

Here we are again. The struggle for real justice and real freedom in America never really ended, in spite of what some of us have been led to believe. It has been over a month since Sean Bell was murdered and his two friends, Trent Benefield and Joe Guzman, were badly wounded in a barrage of 50 shots from undercover New York Police Department officers. There is still no indictment, and there is a growing concern, in communities around New York City and throughout America, that these police officers will get off completely, if a trial even occurs.

Let me make it very clear that the Bell family, from my conversations with them last night, understand that there are good police officers. Let me also make it clear that they do not want the rhetoric of violence or revenge or disrespect for the NYPD in general around their vigil. Nor are they interested in having individuals or organizations trying to use the tragedy of Sean Bell's death for other agendas. They simply want justice for what happened to Sean Bell. And they certainly could use help and support from concerned human beings such as yourself.

I am hoping that churches, church leaders and other religious and spiritual leaders will encourage their believers to support this important effort. Indeed, as we celebrate the life and legacy of Dr. King at this time of year, I think it would be remarkably hypocritical for any church, any mosque or masjid, any synagogue or any religious or spiritual leader to, on the one hand, talk about Dr. King, honor Dr. King, yet say and do nothing in support of this very peaceful and very simple vigil for Sean Bell. Dr. King was a man of action, not just talk, and those of us in leadership positions who have sizable followings need to be as well.

Police brutality toward Black and Latino communities is one of the great issues of our



50 SHOTS, 50 DAYS: Outside the 103rd Precinct in Jamaica, Queens, friends, family and supporters hold a 50-day vigil to demand justice for the murder of Sean Bell, who was killed just hours before his wedding on Nov. 25 in a hail of 50 bullets fired by undercover police officers. PHOTO: EDGAR MATA

time. If we were to read Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech in its entirety, we would note that Dr. King uses the term "police brutality" twice in that famous address. The more things have changed, the more they have stayed the same.

I am hoping that elected officials, from Queens and from all across the New York metro area participate in this vigil. The people you represent need to see that you care. They need to see you on the frontlines with the Bell family.

I am hoping that civil rights organizations, service organizations, labor unions, fraternities and sororities, activists and organizers will support this effort, mobilize their bases to come out, and spread the word, near and far, to their networks.

I am hoping that college students will participate and encourage their peers to support this important effort. Any time real change has happened in America, or on this planet, young people have been at the forefront. Well, you all are needed now more than ever.

I am hoping that hip-hop heads every-

where, the famous and the unknown, will support this important effort. Time and again the hip-hop generation, the hip-hop community, has been knocked and mocked for not caring about social issues. Well, here is our opportunity to make a difference in an historic way.

I am hoping that professionals and professional organizations will support this important effort. Your skill sets and access to resources are sorely needed to sustain this vigil.

I am hoping that men, especially Black and Latino men, will support this effort. I duly noted the number of women present last night. Women, as usual, are holding it down, but we need men to step to the plate as well. Men are especially needed for the late night to morning shifts, around 11 p.m. to 6 a.m.

As I said to young Black and Latino men driving by last night, Sean Bell is YOU. Sean Bell could have been YOU.

Kevin Powell is a Brooklyn-based writer and community activist. This was excerpted from a letter posted on <http://nyc.indymedia.org>.

How You Can Support the 50-day Sean Bell Vigil in Queens:

There is a need for people of all backgrounds and all persuasions to participate in the vigil in shifts, day and night, weekday and weekend. Even if you can only participate for an hour or two each week, please come out.

TIME: 24 hours, 7 days a week, begun on Monday, Jan. 1, and concluding on Monday, Feb. 19.
LOCATION: Directly across from the 103rd Precinct on 168th Street, off Jamaica Avenue and 91st Avenue, in Jamaica, Queens.

PLEASE CALL 1-866-695-2992 IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE VIGIL OR OFFER SUPPORT.

- If you cannot physically participate in the 50-day vigil, here are items needed to support the Sean Bell Vigil through to its completion:
- > The donation of at least two portable toilets for the duration of the vigil
 - > Food, lots of food
 - > Drinks (bottled water, juices)
 - > Paper towels
 - > Toilet paper
 - > Comfortable folding chairs for the elders who are participating
 - > Portable, battery-operated heaters
 - > Portable, battery-operated outdoor lights
 - > Batteries for heaters and outdoor lights
 - > Tents or tarp covering in case of bad weather
 - > Blankets
 - > Thousands of copies of the one-page flier promoting the vigil
 - > Individuals willing to pass out the vigil flier around New York City
 - > Write letters to your city councilperson, your state assemblyperson, your state senator, your district leader, your community board president and your congressperson, inquiring what each of them is doing to fight for procedural and behavior reform within the New York Police Department, via the legislative process.

District Attorney Stalls on Interviewing Shooter Cops

BY ANN SCHNEIDER

It lingers in our psyche as insult upon injury. Under their union contract, New York City police officers were given 48 hours to confer with a union representative or a lawyer before they could be made to answer to the Internal Affairs Division. To those of us concerned with police brutality, it was a poke in the eye: two whole days to come up with a story that would fit with the public facts but excuse any police misconduct.

But the notorious 48-hour rule is no longer in force. It never had the force of law; it was only a provision in the union contract. The city sought to take it off the table in negotiations with the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association (PBA) and it won before the Public Employment Relations Board (PERB). Sensing its loss of privilege, the PBA appealed the PERB decision all the way to the state's highest court. It lost in March 2006. The Court of Appeals said that the need for "strong disciplinary authority for those in charge of police forces" outweighs the policy of encouraging collective bargaining.

But despite the demise of the 48-hour rule, not all of the five officers involved in the shooting of Sean Bell have yet been questioned by Internal Affairs. On Dec. 29, one detective was questioned by the Queens district attorney. He testified without immunity against possible later charges. Another has said he would testify to a grand jury, a sign that he believes his conduct is justifiable. The other three are keeping their options open, as is their right unless and until District Attorney Richard Brown decides to charge them with a crime. But nothing prevents the DA from interviewing each of the officers as witnesses while the events are fresh in their mind. The right against self-incrimination only applies if and when suspicion begins to focus on an individual officer and he becomes a target of a criminal investigation.

Why hasn't District Attorney Brown interviewed all of the officers involved in the shooting of Sean Bell on Nov. 25? The only explanation is that the DA lacks the political will to scrutinize the conduct of the officers of the NYPD. Assistant district attorneys rely on cops each and every day to determine what charges to bring and to help them prove their cases. Prosecutors are reluctant to bite the hand that feeds them information, especially as they become emotionally invested in a case.

Civil rights activists are correct to call for a special, independent prosecutor to eliminate this institutional conflict of interest. The governor is permitted to remove the district attorney in a specific case and replace him with his attorney general. Outgoing National Lawyers Guild New York Chapter President Marty Stolar notes that this power was used by George Pataki in 1996 to remove Bronx District Attorney Robert Johnson from a case because Johnson said he would not ask for the death penalty. Elliot Spitzer should consider intervening in the Bell case to ensure that all of the evidence comes out. This would be a fitting beginning for a man in whom many have invested their hopes for justice.

This column is a project of the National Lawyers Guild, New York City Chapter. Contact us at 212-679-6018.

THE IPA'S DOMINO EFFECT: The Enron of Indie Media Leaves

BY CHRIS ANDERSON



IPA-NY Executive Director Juana Ponce de Leon.
PHOTO: SEVENSTORIES.COM

New York Independent Press Association Survives

Even as its parent organization disintegrates, the IPA-New York hopes not only to survive, but to thrive. “On a personal level, I am very sorry that the organization in San Francisco is closing,” says Tomaz Deptula, a business editor with *Nowy Dziennik* (*Polish Daily News*) and an IPA-NY steering committee member. “But on the other side of the country we are continuing what we have been doing in New York, and the hope is that we will emerge stronger from all of this.”

IPA-NY runs an advertising co-op and provides technical assistance for dozens of local ethnic and community papers, publishes “Voices That Must Be Heard,” a weekly online newsletter that features the best work of its member papers, sponsors the “Ippie” community journalism awards and runs the Campus Journalism Project and the George Washington Williams Fellowship, which helps journalists of color thrive in the magazine field. Some or all of these programs are expected to continue without interruption.

“The model we’ve developed here is very community rooted,” says IPA-NY Executive Director Juana Ponce de Leon. “We’re very close to our members, we can communicate with them easily, we can gather them together very easily. That was a lot different from the way it worked in San Francisco.”

—CHRIS ANDERSON

Emerging from of the ‘zine scene of the 1980s, and fueled by the rising tide of activism that emerged in full force at the 1999 Seattle WTO protests, *Clamor Magazine* was small, scrappy and widely loved. In 2006 the glossy quarterly — whose professional looks didn’t stop it from embracing and even seeking out first-time writers — expanded its operations to include the Clamor Infoshop, a consignment and distribution service that helped other lefty projects merchandise their materials. Winners of multiple magazine awards over its six-year history and aided by the Independent Press Association (IPA), a nationwide support and distribution network of primarily small and medium-sized magazines founded in 1996, *Clamor* was on its way up.

Barely within the span of a month in late 2006, however, first *Clamor*, then the Clamor Infoshop, and then finally the entire IPA were gone, victims of a spiraling tidal wave of financial mismanagement that began in San Francisco and has claimed victims in Bowling Green, Ohio; Chicago, New York City and beyond. Now, nearly every small lefty magazine in the United States — along with a half-dozen other projects and a consortium of ethnic papers in New York — faces an uncertain, even bleak, future. For many of them, there is no future: In addition to *Clamor*, the magazine *Kitchen Sink* has recently closed, at least two other publications are rumored to have shut their doors, while many more teeter on the brink of extinction.

THE FINANCIAL ABYSS

In September 2006, even as *Clamor* editors began to seriously grapple with the possibility of their magazine’s demise, the executive director of the San Francisco-based IPA, Richard Landry, was touting the IPA’s success in an online interview with the radio show *AfterTV*. Founded in 1996 by John Anner, the IPA was a membership organization composed of niche magazines like *Clamor*, *Kitchen Sink*, *Bitch* and *Tikkun*. Designed to advocate for and provide services to more than 500 members, the IPA ran a distribution service for more than 100 magazines, engaged in marketing work, organized an annual publishing conference and offered its membership access to an emergency loan fund.

But even as Landry was publicly bragging about his organization’s past successes, the IPA — like *Clamor* — was staring into a financial abyss. On Dec. 27 the IPA dissolved, still owing its members (many of whom had, in the past year and a half, become its creditors) tens or possibly hundreds of thousands of dollars.

A number of different arguments have been advanced to explain the collapse of the IPA. The IPA’s letter to its members announcing its closure speaks of “a very harsh newsstand market,” a dry-up in foundation funding and industry consolidation.

Other observers blame the Internet — “We’re only still beginning to see the full impact of the Internet on every corner of

the media industry, and there’s much more upheaval to come,” says CUNY Professor of Journalism Jeff Jarvis.

But for an astounding number of former IPA members and ex-staffers, the answer boils down to two words: Richard Landry.

The IPA failed “because of vast organization and financial mismanagement,” says Anne Moore of *Punk Planet*. “I don’t think we can blame anything else for this issue. All the stuff about media conglomeration that they’re talking about doesn’t make up for the fact that it was dishonesty, obfuscation and vast amounts of money going to places it shouldn’t have gone that caused this.”

The Independent was unable to reach

money they were owed. “Financially, it goes without saying that the missed payments were devastating,” says Moore.

For many of the small magazines that made up the IPA’s membership, a worse blow than the lack of money was the inability to get any information out of Landry and the IPA management until it was almost too late; the *SF Weekly* article documents months of increasingly acrimonious public email exchanges, forced non-disclosure agreements, fired board members and opaque statements about the true status of the IPA from Landry and what one ex-member referred to as his “sycophantic” board of directors. Abby Scherr, founder and

But even as Landry was publicly bragging about his organization’s past successes, the IPA — like *Clamor* — was staring into a financial abyss.

Landry for comment. The IPA’s fiduciary services firm, Uecker & Associates, failed to return calls.

For months, a feeling of a slow strangulation had been building around the IPA membership, even as Landry touted the rejuvenation of the organization to just about anyone who would listen. In July 2006, a major investigative piece by the *SF Weekly* raised the curtain on what appeared to be years of financial mismanagement of the IPA’s magazine distribution arm, Big Top Newsstand Services (now called Indy Press Newsstand Services). As of early 2006, according to the *Weekly* piece, IPNS owed dozens of its magazine clients a total of more than \$500,000, a huge sum of money in a tiny, undercapitalized industry.

THE PERILS OF DISTRIBUTION

A complex and logistically cumbersome enterprise, magazine distribution forms the essential link between the process of print media creation and the final, financial exchange in which a publication is purchased from the shelves of a bookstore — increasingly, one of the “big box stores” that dominate the retail market. Because the money chain in the magazine world travels backward, most magazines don’t see revenue from newsstand sales immediately, making accurate accounting and financial transparency on the part of the distributor essential.

Big Top’s financial woes seem to have predated Landry’s arrival at the IPA in 2003. In discussions with *SF Weekly*, some current and ex-IPA employees noted that the organization was using non-Big Top funds to cover Big Top expenses. Nevertheless, between 2003 and 2005 — two years after Landry first joined the organization as IPA founder John Anner’s replacement — the entire IPNS distribution operation began to unravel. Promised payments never arrived in members’ checking accounts, and the IPNS and its magazines began to disagree increasingly on the amount of

former director of the IPA office in New York City, recalls a similar combination of disorganization and opacity. “I once attended a board meeting where the board did not seem to care that the executive director could not produce a budget or even viable financial reports,” she writes.

In the summer of 2006, with the publication of the *SF Weekly* article pending, Landry and the IPA seemed to face up to the public relations and financial disaster that the once-proud organization had become. They first announced an agreement with the Canadian-based Disticor Magazine Distribution Services; Disticor would handle the logistics of the actual distribution of IPA member titles, while the IPA itself would continue to market its members. At about the same time the board, looking to streamline its mission, mandated that IPA-New York spin itself off into a separate organization (see sidebar). Finally, Landry offered his members a deal: sign a three-year, three-way contract with Disticor and the IPA and be paid back “within weeks,” or strike out on their own, with undetermined financial consequences. Some of IPA’s larger publications — *Bitch*, *Tikkun*, *Mother Jones* — took the opportunity to leave. Many smaller magazines, however, desperate for cash, saw no alternative but to re-sign.

One of those that did re-sign was *Clamor*. “Signing the Disticor deal was good for future sales,” says Jen Angel, *Clamor*’s co-founder. “Even newsstand consultants looked at the contract and thought it was OK.” But faith in the professionalism of Disticor was different than actually having much hope that IPA would make good on what it owed its members. Moore of *Punk Planet*, who held her nose and re-signed, agrees. “We didn’t have much choice [to sign the new contract],” she says. When asked whether *Punk Planet* held out much hope of actually getting its money back, Moore laughs. “Well, getting our money back was written into the contract and was

Publications in a Pinch

promised to us a number of times by Richard Landry directly. But then again, we're not stupid."

The closure of the IPA has, at least for now, rendered many of the discussions about eventual payback moot. After repeatedly trying to contact the law firm handling the IPA's bankruptcy, Amy Schroeder of *Venus Zine* received an e-mail in early January informing her that she would eventually receive the paperwork through which to document what her magazine was owed. "Dan [Sinker, of *Punk Planet*] said that he thinks all that's left at the IPA is some desks and computers," says Schroeder. "*Venus Zine* is owed much more than that – I think most of the publications are."

While the IPA still promises it will make good with those it owes, the terms of the General Assignment of Creditors under which it dissolved meant now that both the debts and assets are in the hands of a third party. Even if the magazines do eventually get something back, "I have a feeling there are big differences between what the magazines say they are owed and what the IPA says they owe the magazines," speculates Jeremy Smith, who served as interim executive director between the Anner and Landry tenures. "I don't know that this is true for sure, I'm guessing here, but I saw it happen while I was there so I don't see why it wouldn't happen now."

'MAY AS WELL BE ENRON'

Without a commitment to honesty, transparency and its organizational mission, writes Smith on his weblog, "a non-profit may as well be Enron. In the end, that's exactly what the IPA became."

For her part, Jen Angel is careful not to lay the blame for the closure of *Clamor* entirely at the feet of the IPA. The distribution debacle "was an influence but it wasn't the whole problem. It definitely had an impact, though it's hard to estimate what the impact was." Angel argues that the money IPA owed *Clamor* was only part of what eventually helped drag *Clamor* under; the bigger problem was that the uncertainty caused by being owed money kept *Clamor* from developing an appropriate strategy to secure its future.

This lack of information from the IPA was the key blow, agrees Smith. "If *Kitchen Sink* or *Clamor* had known for sure when their money would arrive, they might have been able to plan and keep on publishing."

The end for *Clamor*, when it finally came, struck with remarkable speed. In November 2006, Angel and *Clamor* co-founder Jason Kusma confirmed to their readers and subscribers via e-mail that "the rumors were true." The magazine would cease publication, effective immediately. The editors, media-makers to the last, noted that the end came with the 39th issue "in the final stages of layout, but thousands of dollars away from the printer."

"Richard Landry definitely made poor choices," Angel concludes "and the worst thing he did was that when the distribution arm started to tank he wasn't honest with the members."

The story, however, fails to end there. In the latest ironic fallout stemming from

Clamor's collapse, the seizure of the *Clamor* Infoshop's assets by one of *Clamor's* creditors, Sky Bank, has, in turn, left half a dozen even smaller lefty projects in the financial lurch – including *\$pread Magazine*, *Justseeds*, *Left Turn*, and others. The seizure of the Infoshop "immediately shut down *Justseeds's* online store," wrote founder Josh MacPhee in a panicked financial appeal posted online on Dec. 20, 2006. "This was a complete shock, as ... no one [at *Clamor*] had mentioned the possibility of collapse or bankruptcy. On top of shutting down distribution, their fulfillment house owed *Justseeds* upwards of \$10,000."

"Because everything in the Infoshop store operates on consignment," sighs Angel, "it was normal procedure to owe people money. We were also behind on payments by one or two months because we were fighting to save the magazine. That's not good, we know that, but it's not as if we were defrauding anyone. Look, I personally don't have their money. If I did, I would write them all a check."

Meanwhile, Angel expects her final act as *Clamor* co-founder and publisher will be to file for personal bankruptcy. "This wasn't how I saw all this ending when we started," Angel admits.

LOOKING AHEAD

For many publishers struggling to survive in the aftermath of the IPA meltdown, even the best possible future looks grim. The threat of multiple lawsuits hangs in the air, and the void created by the loss of several magazines is already being felt. "One of the most troubling things," says Moore of *Punk Planet*, "is the sheer number of incredibly well-written articles we're getting. What we're getting is double the number we normally would, which means that we're getting the runoff from all the magazines that have just folded. It's great for *Punk Planet* – maybe. But it's terrible for our community."

"The positive thing about the IPA story is that, when it was working, it helped an enormous number of magazines, including *Clamor*," Jeremy Smith concludes. "A lot of them would have died much sooner without the IPA. The end of the IPA won't stop the independent press – people will come up with solutions to problems that they're facing. I just hope they don't have to deal with the same problems all over again ten years down the road."

Indyendent Exceeds Year-End Fundraising Goal

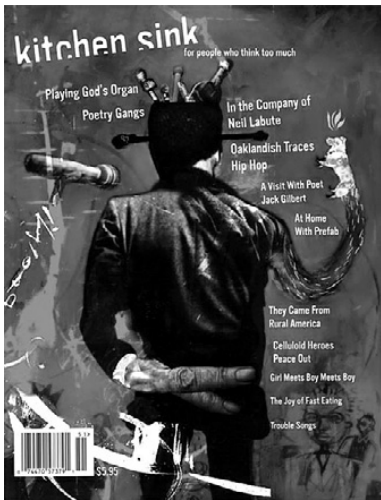
Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, *The Indyendent* has exceeded its year-end fundraising goal of \$10,000. Donations were matched in part by a grant from Omidyar.net. Your support enables us to continue printing this newspaper and fostering gutsy, award-winning, independent journalism. If you haven't given yet, see indyendent.org. Every dollar given through Jan. 31 will be matched.

Again, from the bottom of our collective heart, thank you!

—The Staff of *The Indyendent*



Photo: Antrim Caskey



Progressive Media Powers Through

The last decade has seen a flourishing of various sorts of independent media, even as the mainstream corporate media continue to consolidate, lock out diverse voices, and place a growing emphasis on "infotainment" and celebrity at the expense of an informed and engaged citizenry. Here's a snapshot of where various independent media projects stand in the United States.

- **PACIFICA RADIO** (pacifica.org): The largest leftist radio network in the United States, Pacifica controls radio signals in five major media markets (New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Houston and Washington, D.C.) that can potentially reach 20 percent of the U.S. population. Although various stations continue to suffer from seemingly endless internecine feuding, the network as a whole appears healthy.
- **DEMOCRACY NOW!** (democracynow.org): The left's only national daily broadcast. Launched by Pacifica in 1996, it has grown spectacularly during the Bush years, becoming an independent operation that is carried on more than 450 TV and radio stations around the United States.
- **"LOW-POWER FM"**: The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) legalized low-power "pirate radio" in 2000 and has since issued hundreds of licenses for stations of 100 watts or less. While community-based activists have been able to launch stations in places like Woodburn, Oregon; Urbana, Illinois; Immokalee, Florida; Deale, Maryland and Opelousas, Louisiana, LP-FM is still not permitted in large urban areas.
- **COMMUNITY ACCESS TV & THE MANHATTAN NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORK (MNN)**: These are difficult times indeed for community TV stations. Just before Christmas, the FCC voted to adjust cable franchising laws, stripping local communities of the power to gather revenues from pay-television providers. According to Anthony Riddle, executive director at the Alliance for Community Media, "Several large companies [are in the process of] taking over the entire communications system."
- **LARGER, WELL-FUNDED LEFT-LEANING MAGAZINES** – *The Nation*, *The Progressive*, *Mother Jones* – have thrived in the Bush years. *The Nation's* subscriber base has grown from 96,000 in 2000 to more than 170,00 in 2006. There have been similar (though less dramatic) increases for *Mother Jones* and *The Progressive*.
- **LEFTY BLOGOSPHERE**: The 2006 "Yearly Kos" convention in Las Vegas, coupled with Democratic victories in the midterm elections, consolidated the position of a few major blogs – the Daily Kos, Eschaton, Talkingpointsmemo.com, Think Progress – as dominant players in the online media world. However, these blogs have been criticized for their closeness to the Democratic Party and their lack of true grassroots participation.
- **INDYMEDIA** (indymedia.org, nyc.indymedia.org): Now entering its eighth year since it emerged out of the 1999 Seattle WTO protests, Indymedia is a global, decentralized network of grassroots media-makers located in more than 150 cities on six continents. Primarily based on the Internet, it is best known for its galvanizing coverage of political protest and its participatory ethos, but finds itself challenged by the rise of new technologies that no longer make it a unique place to self-publish and "be the media." There is currently much discussion of developing "Indymedia 2.0," making the network a more interactive and effective tool for grassroots political organizing.
- **THE INDYDEPENDENT**: The largest, longest-running newspaper published within the Indymedia network. Launched in 2000, *The Indy* has won more "Ippies" (annual community journalism awards given by IPA-NY) than any other paper in New York City each of the past three years. Now approaching its 100th issue, it is also widely read online at <http://www.indyendent.org>.

—CHRIS ANDERSON & JOHN TARLETON

Sack that Quack Keroack

the g-string
BY AMY WOLF

Reproductive Rights Community Steps up Fight to Oust Anti-Abortion Appointee



Over the past six years, one hallmark of the Bush administration has been the appointment of unqualified people to positions overseeing programs with which they fundamentally disagree. In November, Dr. Eric Keroack, a former medical director of A Woman's Concern – an anti-abortion “pregnancy crisis center” that discourages young women from getting abortions – was appointed to a post overseeing reproductive health care for millions. As the deputy assistant secretary for population affairs, he now leads the nation's family planning program, Title X, which provides health care to five million families who would otherwise have no access to basic health services, including access to prescription birth control.

While Keroack's predecessor, Alma Golden, did little to fight for the chronically underfunded Title X, Keroack is expected to put his hard-line abstinence-only beliefs into action.

Keroack was applauded by Focus on the Family for using ultrasound technology to influence women who he described as “abortion vulnerable” while at A Woman's Concern. He is also dismissed as a crank in medical communities for his unproven claims that sex outside of marriage depletes bonding chemicals, dooming any subsequent marriage. “People who have misused sex to become bonded with multiple persons will diminish their oxytocin bonding within their current relationship. In the absence of oxytocin, the person will find less or no excitement. The person will then feel the need to move on to what looks more exciting,” said Keroack, who views sexuality as “a war zone.”

“If Golden and Keroack had their way, a 55-year-old woman, recently divorced and seeking family planning

services, would be told that her expected standard of behavior is no sex outside of marriage,” says Bill Smith, vice president of public policy at the Sexuality Information and Educational Council of the United States (SIECUS).

Despite Golden's refusal to request any new funds for the program, Title X is still able to fund 4,500 clinics around the country to provide basic health services, including contraceptive services; gynecological exams; pregnancy testing; screening for HIV and other STDs, cervical and breast cancer, high blood pressure, anemia, and diabetes; and provide health education and referrals for other health and social services.

“If Alma Golden was a thorn in our side, then Dr. Eric Keroack is a slap in the face,” Smith told *The Independent*. There's nothing like a slap in the face to start a good fight. Public outcry began as soon as Keroack was appointed; and the fight to remove him is gathering momentum. Tens of thousands of signed letters requesting that Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt “sack Keroack,” collected by NOW, Planned Parenthood and other groups, were delivered to the Senate on Nov. 17 and to the House on Nov. 20. Leavitt issued no response. On Dec. 20, 110 members of Congress signed on to a letter addressed to President Bush, demanding Keroack's removal. Again, there was no response from Leavitt.

Activists in the Reproductive Rights Community have no intentions of letting up on the pressure, and there is some hope that the new Democratic majority in Congress may be willing and able to pressure Leavitt to have Keroack step down. Grassroots efforts are focusing on getting Congress to make his removal a priority before he can inflict any real damage. So call your senator or representative today and demand they put pressure on Mike Leavitt to “sack Keroack!”



Common Ground volunteers prepare to gut a house in the Lower Ninth Ward.
PHOTO: COMMONGROUNDRELIEF.ORG

BY CLARK MERREFIELD

In November 2006 on his blog, solving-poverty.blogspot.com, San Jose State University Professor Scott Myers-Lipton proposed the government hire 100,000 unemployed and displaced New Orleans residents at a living wage to rebuild their communities. Named the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project, Myers-Lipton's proposal has been received positively by Congress.

“The people that we've talked to on the Hill have been incredibly excited about the project,” he said.

Among the project's supporters in Congress is Zoe Lofgren (D-Calif.). “Working with congressional representatives from the Gulf Coast Region, I hope that we can transform this good idea into an actual plan that may have a positive impact on rebuilding the region and building up the working families of the Gulf Coast who

were frozen out of the process by prior efforts,” said Lofgren, in a Dec. 14 press statement.

Myers-Lipton has also helped organize the Louisiana Winter, Jan. 14-20. Reminiscent of the Freedom Summer of 1964, hundreds of college students will travel to New Orleans to put the national focus back on the city.

Rochelle Smarr, a third-year San Jose State student and president of her campus's Student Homeless Alliance, plans to participate.

“I feel we should all be out there trying to help the people in the after effects of Katrina,” she said. “Students have the chance to use their voice as activists. I feel it's a great opportunity to get out there and see it for myself and see what I can do to help my own people.”

The students can expect to see the worst, according to Sakura Kone of Common Ground Collective in New Orleans, a com-

Students Give NOLA Helping Hand

munity activist network that has provided housing and training for hundreds of volunteers in post-Katrina New Orleans.

“They are going to learn that the people who are affected by this hurricane were disproportionately Black people,” Kone said. “They're going to learn that the political and economic establishment has a vision for this city that is contrary to the original residents'.”

The Gulf Coast Civic Works Project expects to pay workers \$12 per hour and will cost an estimated \$3.12 billion, less than one percent of what has been spent so far on the Iraq War.

Since Katrina, politically connected corporations like Bechtel and Halliburton subsidiary KBR have been largely responsible for the rebuilding efforts in New Orleans. A study by the Institute for Southern Studies called *One Year After: The State of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast* found evidence that Bechtel, which was hired to provide temporary housing, double-billed for trailer maintenance to the tune of \$48 million.

The Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs has held several hearings since February 2006 that have resulted in similar findings. Last month, chairwoman Susan Collins (R-Maine) said corruption has been the major impediment to rebuilding New Orleans.

“No flaw has been more persistent and more damaging – to effective relief for disaster victims and to public confidence in their government – than the rampant fraud, waste and abuse that have plagued federal relief and recovery programs,” she said.

Tracie Washington, director of the NAACP's Gulf Coast Advocacy Center, said the NAACP will provide logistical

support for the Louisiana Winter students, and that she personally will be involved with drafting legislation.

“It really will depend upon whether there is not only Democratic support, but bipartisan support; it's obvious that the Gulf Coast needs to be rebuilt, it's obvious that individuals want to return to the region,” she said. “I think that if everyone can agree on the prefatory problems we should be able to come together and support this type of legislation.”

In addition to raising awareness, the Louisiana Winter students hope to get input from residents to ensure that the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project is modeled to the community's best interests.

“I think one of the main focus points of the Louisiana Winter students is to get to the Gulf Coast region and talk about this proposal, see what kind of support there is, have meetings to discuss the needs of the community, so that there isn't something being promoted that the community can't stand behind,” Washington said.

Kone noted that New Orleans residents may not be receptive toward more government involvement.

“They're very skeptical of the government, but if the government did the right thing – these people need jobs,” he said. “People are starving for employment out here.”

Myers-Lipton said he expects the diverse student population that has signed up for the Louisiana Winter to enter New Orleans with open minds.

“We come really humbly, we don't have all the answers, but we have one answer, and we want to go to Louisiana and share that possibility,” he said.

GI Cup o' Joe

NEW COFFEEHOUSE FOR SOLDIERS OPENS NEAR FORT DRUM

BY MATT PASCARELLA

Fort Drum, N.Y. is one of the largest military bases in the northeast United States. This installation has the highest per-capita deployment of soldiers as well as the highest re-enlistment rate of any U.S. base.

Nearly three months ago, author and activist Tod Ensign, along with volunteers from Citizen Soldier and Veterans for Peace, opened a coffeehouse for GIs a few miles from Ft. Drum. The Different Drummer café is similar to those that sprang up during the Vietnam War to provide off-duty soldiers with a place to hang out, listen to music and become politically active. (See sidebar for more on the Vietnam-era GI coffeehouse movement.)

THAT WAS THEN – THIS IS NOW

I ask Ensign how many soldiers have been coming into Different Drummer since its opening. “Some soldiers come into the coffeehouse when we have an event – like live music. They’ll hang out, they’ll dance, and then they might check out the books, look around curiously but that’s it. So far we have not been able to attract more than a few soldiers.”

Ensign’s café is the first of its kind since the Vietnam era and aside from “getting the word out” about the café, he faces deeper challenges. “The conditions of service and who serves in the military today are much different than during Vietnam,” he tells me.

The most fundamental difference is that the military is now an all-volunteer force. Cultural differences are significant, too. The counter-cultural movements of the 1960s appealed to a lot of young soldiers who served at that time.

“During the GI movement there was a sense of identification with this larger movement – anti-war, anti-imperialist, women’s movements, black movements” and a culture of music, sex and drugs that coexisted with those politics, which soldiers could access and be a part of when going to coffeehouses. This sense of connection to a larger movement doesn’t seem to exist today.

Another crucial difference, he tells me, is how people access information today.

“The coffeehouses thrived on the publishing of newspapers. There were 250 papers and newsletters – some of which lasted a few issues and some of which lasted a few years. Today, I can’t see any evidence of that. We’ve tried to get something going up there, to have a blog and have people write about their experiences, and so far we haven’t had any luck.

“Bookstores were also an important part of the GI projects. Yet, from what I can see, young people don’t seem to be drawn to books or pamphlets. We have a whole bookstore there, racks of books, some of which we give away for free and we are hardly able to even give them away.

“The use of writing and engagement around publishing doesn’t seem, so far, to be a draw at all. No one comes in and says, ‘I wrote this poem, I’m back from Iraq.’ ‘I wrote this rap, I’m back from Iraq.’” As for printing it, “that hasn’t happened so far.”

“Soldiers don’t come in where it’s going to be a discussion, where there’s going to be dialogue and to maybe hear their views on ura-

nium weapons, or their views on whether they should be sent back for a third tour.” Therefore, many of the events at Different Drummer feature either live music or film screenings, including a Saturday afternoon film series.

DIFFERENT APPROACHES

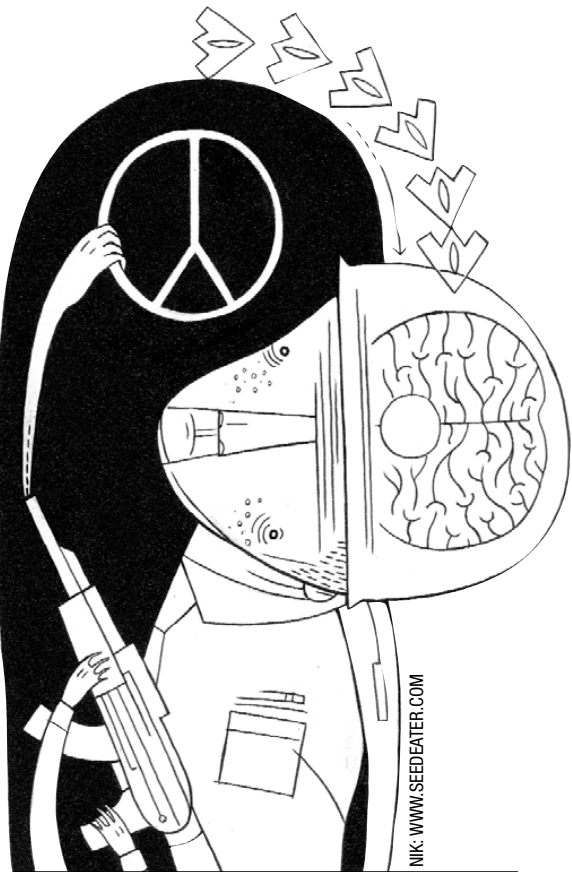
“We’re in a testing period now,” Ensign says; “We are trying different methods, different approaches and we’re trying to outreach in different ways.” The ultimate goal, he says, “is to figure out ways to get the trust of people and make them see our coffeehouse as a social space that is open to whatever they want to work around, organize around.”

A Vietnam vet who works at Ft. Drum and helps Different Drummer told Ensign under condition of anonymity that mental health services on the base are overrun. Using this knowledge, along with the fact that a high percentage of soldiers returning from combat are already likely to suffer post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Ensign and his team have put an emphasis on “providing neutral information” on these issues.

The café is planning an event in February featuring a specialist on PTSD and is hoping to have personnel from the Veterans’ administration medical services attend. This information will also be available at the café’s St. Patrick’s Day event, which will welcome home the 3rd Brigade, nearly 6,000 troops, from Iraq.

Aside from the psychological effects of war, Ensign says soldiers at Ft. Drum face basic quality-of-life issues. Different Drummer is looking at housing problems, which force some soldiers to be bussed nearly 30 miles to get home from the base, and family pressures on soldiers facing multiple deployments as potential areas to offer support.

In terms of convincing soldiers that enough is enough, Tod believes there is a lot of work to do, but the tipping point may be nearing. “It is a conjuncture of events: It’s falling public support, it’s doubts within the military itself about the enterprise, it’s the toll that it takes on them with post-traumatic stress, with their families, their children, the injuries – and I have to believe that at some point it’ll begin to erode and crack. When that happens we have to be in a place where we can connect to them.”



A DIFFERENT ERA: A LOOK AT THE GI COFFEEHOUSES OF VIETNAM

The first GI coffeehouse popped up near Ft. Jackson, S.C., in January 1968 and was jokingly called “UFO” – its name a play on the military’s clubs known by the acronym USO. It was the only integrated place in the city, its regulars consisting not just of blacks and whites, but also students from the local university and GIs.

Within a year, more than 20 similar coffeehouses opened near military bases throughout the United States, attracting a large number of GIs against the war. Eventually soldiers began to use the cafés as places to write about their experiences and views on the war. By 1970, more than 50 underground newsletters were being clandestinely circulated on military bases throughout the country – including publications like *Fed Up!*, *Bragg Briefs*, *Helping Hand* and *About Face*.

The cafés became small centers for dissenting soldiers while serving domestic assignments. They fed not only underground publications and served as places to plan actions on the bases. This dissatisfaction with the military and the war spread to the front lines of Vietnam as well.

The first coffeehouse, UFO, was closed by a court order that declared it a “public nuisance.” Some of the other cafés were targeted by firebombs and by local police. Following the end of the war, many closed.

—MATT PASCARELLA

A Bellwether Trial

EHREN WATADA'S COURT-MARTIAL AND THE IRAQ WAR

BY ALI WINSTON

Six months after Army First Lt. Ehren Watada formally refused his deployment to Iraq, pretrial hearings in his court-martial case were heard on Jan. 4. Watada, 28, is being charged with missing a troop movement for his June 22 refusal to accompany his Fort Lewis, Wash.-based infantry unit to the Middle East. He is also charged with conduct unbecoming an officer and contempt toward officials, based on remarks in which he advocated resistance to the war he made to journalists and activists.

Watada, a native of Honolulu, appears to face an uphill battle in his trial. His defense centers on the premise that the war in Iraq is illegal, but the presiding judge does not appear inclined to allow the submission of evidence contesting the legality of the 2003 invasion.

However, the judge also refused to let the prosecution interview eight potential witnesses in the pretrial hearing, including journalists Sarah Olson, Gregg Kakesako, and Dahr Jamail. The journalists were all subpoenaed by the Army to corroborate statements Watada made regarding the war.

“As I read about the level of deception the Bush administration used to initiate and process this war, I was shocked,” Watada told Olson in May 2006. “I became ashamed of wearing the uniform. How can we wear something with such a time-honored tradition, knowing we waged war based on a misrepresentation and lies?”

Watada’s case has made waves across the nation and has attracted antiwar groups from Hawaii and elsewhere to his cause. On the day of his pretrial hearing, 28 protesters rallying in his support were arrested in front of the San Francisco Federal Building.

The full trial will begin Feb. 5 and will be a key indicator of the government’s willingness to suppress dissent within the military as the Iraq occupation deteriorates.

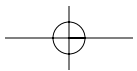
Watada, who faces a maximum of six years in prison if found guilty, remains stoic at the prospect of jail time. “I’ll still get out...It’s just one chapter of my life,” he told the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*.



VIGIL IN CHELSEA

A handful of activists from United for Peace and Justice, Chelsea Neighbors United to End the War and the Raging Grannies held a vigil in Chelsea on Jan. 2 commemorating the 3000th United States soldier to be killed in Iraq. As of Jan. 7, 2007, 3011 U.S. soldiers had died in Iraq. More than 650,000 Iraqis are estimated to have died as a result of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, according to a report released in October 2006 by researchers at Johns Hopkins University’s Bloomberg School of Public Health. Chelsea Neighbors United to End the War holds a weekly stand-up against the war on the northwest corner of 24th St. and 8th Ave. on Tuesdays from 6:00 - 7:00 pm.

PHOTO: ANTRIM CASKEY



Bush's Iraq Strategy for 2007: A SECOND CIVIL WAR OR GENOCIDE

BY A.K. GUPTA

Casualties

There is no such thing as "the Iraqi Shia"; rather there is a religious community intersected and divided by class, kinship and regional and geographic factors.

This is why Muqtada al-Sadr has emerged as the most important figure in postwar Iraq. His power derives from a clerical and social welfare network, street loyalty, nativism, urban tribal networks, the dispossessed, Baghdad's Sadr city, Iraqi security forces and a large militia, the Mahdi Army.

As scion of the revered clerical family, Muqtada Sadr inherited control over his father's network of mosques, social services and underground organizations after his father's murder in 1999 at the hands of the Ba'athists. When Saddam Hussein's regime collapsed in April 2003, Sadr and loyal clerics mobilized followers to provide healthcare, security, traffic control, etc. and to offer relief

aid and become a voice of the impoverished urban Shia.

Sadr's followers tend to be xenophobic; they are opposed to the Iranian clerical authority in Najaf and want to put

Sadrists

in its place an Iraqi authority. This is why it's unlikely that Iran supports the Sadrists. They are puritanical, blamed for firebombing liquor stores and cinemas and attacking women who don't adhere to their strict dress codes. Sadr's base is drawn in part from urbanized Shia tribes that moved into Baghdad under the Ba'athists.

While Sadr and his followers were opposed to the U.S. presence, they didn't confront it at first. The Mahdi Army was set up in July 2003, well into an occupation that was being bungled. In 2004, the United States tried to break Sadr's movement through arrests and closing its newspaper, resulting in two separate uprisings. The first coincided with the assault on Fallujah that April. The second happened over the summer, mainly in the holy city of Najaf and in Baghdad.

While Sadr's reach extends through kinship networks from Baghdad to other southern cities, such as Basra and Amara, his forces were unwelcome in Najaf, which was a stronghold of middle-class Shia who benefited significantly from religious tourism. Many in Najaf support another Shia party, SCIRI, and were passive observers to the massive U.S. firepower unleashed on Mahdi fighters. In Najaf and Baghdad, thousands were killed in the U.S. bombardment.

Following the twin uprisings, the Sadrists decided to seek power through the U.S.-organized election process. They won 30 Assembly seats in the December 2005 election, more than 10 percent of the national legislature. Following the bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samarra last year, Mahdi militiamen and allied police began slaughtering Sunni Arabs, pushing Iraq into civil war.

U.S. forces continue to attack Mahdi militia in one-sided skirmishes, but they have not taken the bait. They have improved from their dismal performance in 2004, but are no match for U.S. forces, as is the Sunni insurgency. Rather, they are concentrating on ethnic cleansing in Baghdad to chase out Sunni Arabs and widen their power base and on periodic battles with SCIRI's Badr Brigade for control of various southern cities and towns.

—AKG



April 8, 2004. Shia Muslims in Sadr City chant and express their anger as they prepare to donate blood for Sunni Muslims injured in Fallujah when U.S. forces bombed a mosque there. PHOTO: ANDREWSTERN.NET

BY A.K. GUPTA

After all the study groups and reports, an electoral repudiation, months of deliberation and hundreds of thousands dead, the Bush administration Iraq policy debate boils down to this: choosing between genocide against Sunni Arabs — a strategy known as the "80 percent solution" — or fomenting a second civil war, this one a Shia-on-Shia death match. Or perhaps both.

The new White House strategy begins with the "surge" option. To try to fend off defeat, the Bush administration has decided to send up to 30,000 more troops into the meat grinder. This would be complemented by a move to isolate Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's forces, a pillar of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's government.

National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley outlined the plan in a secret memo published by the *New York Times* in November. Hadley explained that the Bush administration wants to reshuffle Maliki's coalition so he no longer needs the support of 30 Assembly members loyal to Sadr. Afraid this might cause Iraqi security forces to fracture and lead "to major Shia disturbances in southern Iraq," Hadley recommends that the United States "provide Maliki with addi-

tional forces of some kind," the rationale for the surge.

Hadley wrote this memo on Nov. 8, and now the plan is being put into play. One unnamed western diplomat in Baghdad told Reuters, "The Americans want a war with the Mahdi Army. They want to get rid of the militia and it seems they will succeed in getting one."

Joining in the campaign against the Sadrists would be a Shia party that has an alliance of convenience with the Bush administration, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), and its militia, the Badr Brigade. This is where the prospect of a second civil war becomes very real. The Bush strategy is to foment an intra-Shia conflict to try to regain the upper hand. As both the Badr Brigade and Mahdi Army are commingled with various Iraqi police forces, the security forces would splinter, leading to Shia-on-Shia warfare throughout southern Iraq.

Because SCIRI has been scheming to form a Shia "super-region" in southern Iraq, the combination of political and military infighting among the Shia could deliver a deathblow to Iraq, causing it to split into three warring ethnic regions and sparking a regional conflagration as neighboring states

move in to stake their claims.

Only a few observers have picked up on this possibility and the terrifying consequences. Reuel Marc Gerecht, an ex-CIA officer and resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, warned in a Dec. 21 *New York Times* op-ed:

"Any violent struggle between the Mahdi Army and Supreme Council could provoke anarchy throughout the entire Arab Shiite zone, including Iraq's holy cities and the oil-rich south. As bad as things seem now, such Shiite strife could impoverish all of Arab Iraq, dropping the non-Kurdish regions to an Afghan-like subsistence level. In such a situation, we would likely see the hyper-radicalization of the Shiites, who have already become more militant owing to the tenacity and barbarism of the Sunni insurgency."

This fighting has already started. U.S. forces have stepped up their attacks on the Mahdi Army since the summer. During the same period, major clashes between Badr and Mahdi militias have taken place in at least three cities in southern Iraq. U.S. forces have joined Badr units in these battles against the Sadrists. Formalizing these intertwined conflicts as White House policy would ensure that the skirmishes become all-out war.

THE 80 PERCENT SOLUTION

The "80 percent solution," refers to the percentage of Iraqis who are either Shia Arabs or Kurds. According to *The Washington Post*, the policy would entail the United States abandoning "reconciliation efforts with Sunni insurgents and instead give priority to Shiites and Kurds." This would result in U.S. troops "fighting the symptoms of Sunni insurgency without any prospect of getting at the causes behind it — notably the marginalization of the once-powerful minority."

In other words, the United States would back the sectarian war against Sunni Arabs, a prescription for genocide. In scores of Iraq cities and towns with active insurgent groups, the war involves the use of Kurdish and Shia-based security forces against Sunni Arabs. Between U.S. troops trying to crush a broad-based Sunni resistance and Kurdish and Shia forces engaged in massive ethnic cleansing and widespread death squad activity, the Sunni Arabs as an ethno-religious community in Iraq would be wiped out.

The only thing giving the White House pause is fear that other Sunni-majority states, particularly Jordan and Saudi Arabia, would weigh in on the side of their Iraqi brethren.

The other option is to step up a military campaign against Sadr's forces with an attempt to isolate

him politically. The White House is already trying to cobble together its satraps in Iraq — the Kurds, SCIRI and a Sunni party, the Iraqi Islamic Party — to create a majority that will back the United States in crushing Sadr.

SCIRI is a key U.S. ally in Iraq, having served on the U.S.-selected Iraq Governing Council and supporting the occupation for the most part (and relying on it for protection). The head of SCIRI is Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, a former commander of its Badr Brigade militia.

The *Los Angeles Times* detailed the plan, which involves a "major combat offensive against Muqtada Sadr, ... a possible renewed offensive in the Sunni stronghold of Al Anbar province, a large Iraqi jobs program and a proposal for a long-term increase in the size of the [U.S.] military." First, however, "U.S. Embassy officials would have to help usher into power a new coalition in Baghdad that was willing to confront the militias."

This was why Bush held high-profile meetings in Washington with two Iraqi politicians in early December. As *The Washington Post* reported, Bush met with Hakim on Dec. 4 to hedge his administration's "gamble on the weak Maliki government. Bush also met days later with Iraq's Sunni vice president, Tariq al-Hashemi, leader of the Iraqi Islamic Party."

The strategy moved forward in mid-December when, according to the *L.A. Times*, a "group of politicians made up of Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds said ... that it was seeking to form an alliance that could shift Iraq's balance of power."

Locked out were representatives of Sadr, "a sign that the group may want to politically isolate the powerful Shiite preacher." It's no coincidence then that the Mahdi Army, which is active in Baghdad and in Shia areas to the south, is now enemy number one. Conveniently, U.S. estimates of the Mahdi Army's strength have grown from less than 10,000 in 2005 to some 60,000 fighters today.

Badr operates death squads under the banner of the special police commandos. Beginning in 2004, U.S. forces organized, trained and equipped the police commandos, drawing from Hussein-era security forces, to create a neo-Baathist militia and death squad that would hunt Sunni insurgents. Under the Iraq government that took power in April 2005, Bayan Jabr, a former high-ranking commander in the Badr Brigade, took control of the commandos as head of the Interior Ministry. Jabr ousted Sunni personnel in the commandos, putting in place up to 3,000 Badr militiamen, and they quickly began a reign of terror against Sunnis in general.

In this light, fighting between Badr and Mahdi is not just about

clashes between opposing militias, but also about a U.S. strategy to back one side in the sectarian war. Since August 2006, the two militias have clashed in five cities in southern Iraq. The days-long street fighting drew in their allied security forces. In the city of Diwaniyah, battles took place three separate times in a six-week period starting in late August. All three involved U.S. forces backing Badr-controlled security forces — including police commandos in at least two instances — against Mahdi fighters.

Then in September, fierce battles between Badr and Mahdi fighters erupted in the city of Amara, near the border with Iran, killing or wounding almost 200 people. Some 2,300 Iraqi troops who were rushed to the city "were being helped by police commandos," according to the *New York Times*. At the same time, the two militias clashed in two other southern towns. Then in Samawa, in late December, more open warfare occurred between Mahdi forces and local police aligned with SCIRI.

The proliferation of these militia-on-militia battles shows how the loyalties of the Iraqi security units lie with political, religious and ethnic sects, not the Iraqi state. By throwing its force behind Badr against the Mahdi Army, the United States is stoking the sectarian warfare for its own ends.

The final aspect, a U.S. military campaign against the Mahdi Army, is also under way. Since the apparent abduction of a U.S. Army soldier in late October in Baghdad, U.S. forces and Iraqi units have conducted 57 operations, mostly in Mahdi-controlled neighborhoods, while searching for the soldier. "Nasir Saidi, a Sadr legislator, accused U.S. and Iraqi troops of using the search for the missing U.S. soldier as a pretext

to strike his movement," wrote the *L.A. Times* on Dec. 8.

The raids are said to have the blessing of Prime Minister Maliki. Tensions between him and the Sadr loyalists sharpened after Maliki met with Bush in Jordan Nov. 30. Following the meeting, Sadr warned, "Yesterday's friends are today's enemies, and yesterday's enemies are today's friends," according to the AP. Sadr's bloc of Assembly members and five cabinet ministers withdrew from the government in protest.

The U.S. raids against the Mahdi Army likely played a role in Sadr's boycott. Speaking of the operations, high-ranking U.S. military commander said, "We have carte blanche at this point" from the Iraqi government.

"Such a confrontation," Reuel Marc Gerecht argues in the *Times*, "beyond wrecking Iraq politically, would probably allow the worst elements in the Supreme Council — those who envision a religious dictatorship along the lines of Iran — to become more powerful within the party."

Gerecht also predicts that a "genocidal Shiite-versus-Sunni conflict in Iraq — a real possibility — would be much more likely after an intra-Shiite war."

The pieces are all falling into place. The Bush administration is trying to deliver the final blow to the increasingly fragile Iraqi government. While it seems crazy that the White House would seek such a course, it should be remembered that it has escalated the war at every critical juncture, from the mass arrests and torture that fueled the initial insurgency in 2003 to the twin assaults on Fallujah and Mahdi forces in 2004 to the use of death squads starting in 2005 to the surge coming down the pike.

continued on page 10



April 6, 2004. A member of the Mahdi Army stands guard on the roof of the Muqtada Al-Sadr offices in Sadr City. U.S. estimates of the Mahdi Army's strength have grown from less than 10,000 in 2005 to some 60,000 fighters today. PHOTO: ANDREWSTERN.NET

U.S. military deaths in Iraq topped 3,000 last month

The Iraq War is part of our daily soundtrack. It's there in the background, but few pay serious attention to it.

Perhaps this is why the media hasn't noticed this fact: The period from October to December saw the highest combat death rate for U.S. troops for the entire war — more than during the invasion and aftermath, more than the Shia and Sunni uprisings in 2004, more than the razing of Fallujah and more than during the January 2005 election. U.S. military deaths in Iraq topped 3,000 last month — hundreds more, no one knows for certain how many have died in Iraq as private contractors, i.e., mercenaries.

Much of the lack of awareness is deliberate. The Bush administration keeps information and images of deaths to a minimum. The media compound the problem by relegating U.S. deaths to brief mentions buried in stories, whereas three years ago they were front-page news.

The single biggest factor in the rising death toll is improvised explosive devices, or IEDs. Despite \$6.7 billion spent by the Pentagon to counter IEDs, December saw a record 71 U.S. deaths caused by the devices. This increase may be due to the growing use of anti-tank mines among the insurgents, showing how a simple tactic can foil the Pentagon's most concerted efforts.

If little attention has been paid to increasing U.S. deaths, less has been spent on the deaths of Iraqis. It's estimated that 3,000 to 4,000 Iraqis are dying a month, but this is a severe undercount. According to the latest *Lancet* study on excess mortality in Iraq, more than 25,000 Iraqis are dying violently every month. That is, there are more Iraqi deaths in any given week than all American deaths in almost four years of war.

Escalation

According to journalist Uri Avnery, there is a typically Israeli maxim: "If force doesn't work, use more force."

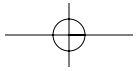
Israel is hardly alone in this phenomenon. It's the M.O. of occupiers throughout history, and the United States is no exception. It may seem perplexing to the public, which just voted for an end to the Iraq War, that the Bush administration is now going to escalate the war by increasing the troop levels. But escalation was also the hallmark of U.S. policy during the Vietnam War. From 1950 to 1954, the United States gave \$3.6 billion in military aid to France, meaning the U.S. taxpayers pretty much funded France's failed effort to hang on to Vietnam.

The next stage of escalation would come during the Kennedy administration with the realization that the dysfunctional South Vietnamese state was falling apart. The response was to increase U.S. military "advisors" from 600 in 1961 to 11,000 in 1962 and 23,000 two years later.

Then came the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964, in which U.S. forces instigated a minor naval dustup with North Vietnam. Within days, President Johnson had a blank check to escalate the war. Over the next four years, as U.S. forces poured into the country and bombs poured on the countryside, the U.S. grip weakened. Despite some 500,000 soldiers in Vietnam, the public, Pentagon and Johnson administration were shocked by the scale of the 1968 Tet Offensive.

While troop levels would be drawn down by the Nixon administration, it escalated the war by conducting horrific bombing campaigns against the civilian population in North Vietnam and widening the war to Cambodia.

The later actions were taken after the public had turned overwhelmingly against the war. It's akin to the Iraq War in which the Bush administration turns to the use of more force where force has failed before.



Antiwar Dems Say Yes to Empire

All one needs to know about the Democrats' position on Iraq is that they've caught the John Kerry disease: They'll oppose the war before they vote to continue supporting it.

They oppose the war by calling on Bush to begin a phased withdrawal of troops. But both Democratic congressional bosses, Nancy Pelosi in the House and Harry Reid in the Senate, leave no doubt that the Democrats in fact support the war because they vowed to continue funding it.

In early January, Pelosi and Reid sent Bush a letter calling for an end to the war. They think Bush will heed a mere request the same week his administration asserted it can open U.S. mail without a warrant after Congress passed a law specifically prohibiting it from doing so.

If there's a firm law in American politics it's never to underestimate the stupidity or cowardice of the Democrats. The party leadership ran away from the Iraq War for most of last year. Then, realizing they could ride it to victory, they fell back on their sole strategy: "Anybody but Bush."

From day one of their November victory they have been trying to subvert their mandate to end the war. In the last two months, leading Democrats, including Reid, Carl Levin in the Senate and Silvestre Reyes, the new House Intelligence Committee chair, have spoken in favor of Bush's proposed escalation.

Sen. Joseph Biden said recently, "This is President Bush's war." That's a big lie. Many Democrats voted for it in 2002 and have voted to fund it for the last four years. Biden is symptomatic of the Democrats' attempt to dodge responsibility. The real reason for their spinelessness, the "support the troops" nonsense and not wanting to appear weak on national security aside, is that they will not challenge Empire.

There is a contradiction here. The realists – from the Iraq Study Group to John Murtha – want a strategic retreat from Iraq to save Empire. They want to refocus on the "war on terror" and broader interests in the strategic arc from North Africa to South Asia, rather than pissing away America's military and economic power so Bush can keep acting squinty-eyed tough. But the realists will not confront the imperial presidency and its arrogation of powers to make war anywhere, anytime. So even though this war is against the interests of the elite, the politicians are unable to end it.

Reining in the state can happen only through a broad democratic grassroots surge. Given the failure of the antiwar movement to do much more than organize ritualistic marches (Cindy Sheehan's persistence is one of the few bright spots), there is no real pressure to end the war.

Antiwar leaders suppressed protests during an election cycle once again in the hopes that the Democrats would deliver us from Iraq. If the antiwar movement is committed to ending the war it needs to act like it. The best route is by making the political lives of the Democrats hell. Only as a result of unrelenting pressure, protests, disruptions, occupations of their offices and more will the Democrats move as a party toward ending this debacle.

Absent that, the Iraq War will go on and will dominate another election two years from now where candidates talk of how much they oppose it even as they remain committed to supporting it. —AKG

A SECOND CIVIL WAR OR GENOCIDE

continued from page 9

In a desperate bid to regain the upper hand, the White House is gambling that it can win a two-front war against both the Sunni and Shia resistance before Iraq implodes in a Middle Eastern World War. Given its track record, the odds for success don't look good.

THE SURGE TO FAILURE

The Bush administration settled on a surge of extra troops not to prevent defeat on the military battlefield of Iraq – the war has long been lost – but defeat on the political battlefield at home. One White House official admitted to *NBC News* that the "surge option is more of a political decision than a military one because the American people have run out of patience and President Bush is running out of time to achieve some kind of success in Iraq."

This is why Bush kicked the Iraq Study Group to the curb, with its recommendation for strategic retreat. But the report did

being eased into retirement. So is Gen. George Casey, Jr., the top commander in Baghdad. He's being pushed out of Iraq because Bush "sees a chance to bring in a new commander as he announces a new strategy."

The media are ignoring the broader strategic issues for the most part and focusing on the modalities of the surge: how many more troops to deploy, what their specific mission is, how long a surge can be sustained. The *New York Times* posits that the extra grunts could try to "blunt the Sunni-led insurgency" while the *L.A. Times* discusses how the extra troops could "confront radical Shiite cleric Muqtada Sadr, perhaps by moving forces into Sadr City," or step up training of Iraqi security forces to take over the fight.

Privately, military officials have derided the surge option. Commanders weren't even considering such a move in November. *The Washington Post* explained at the time

While Bush has said that the generals in Iraq "will make the decisions as to how many troops we have there," he is still "the Decider."

make the status quo untenable. The White House can no longer "stay the course." Therefore, as the *Los Angeles Times* explains, "America must either increase the force – gambling that the military can impose a measure of security on Iraq – or else begin to withdraw its forces."

The White House wants Americans to believe that it can still achieve victory in Iraq, but escalation is a losing strategy, which is why the Pentagon opposed it fiercely. In turn, the Bush administration needed to defeat the resistance in the Pentagon and Iraqi government as a precursor to the surge. Knowing who holds all the big guns in Baghdad, Prime Minister Maliki rolled over the fastest, telling newly minted Defense Secretary Robert Gates "he would let U.S. generals decide whether there is a need for a 'surge' in U.S. troops." So much for the sovereign government of Iraq, according to *The Washington Post*.

Not that the brass will decide. While Bush has said that the generals in Iraq "will make the decisions as to how many troops we have there," he is still "the Decider." Those generals who wouldn't sign on to a military escalation have been ditched. Gen. John Abizaid, the top U.S. commander for the Middle East and a vocal opponent of the surge option, is

"that a boost of 20,000 infantry troops – five or six brigades – would do little to change the nature of the insurgency or the sectarian strife."

The extra troops would all be combat troops. Even though there are 140,000 U.S. troops currently in Iraq, only 50,000 are combat troops, amounting to 15 brigades. There is a tacit acknowledgement that the Pentagon thinks 50,000 more combat troops are required. But that possibility "is virtually off the table ... mainly for logistics reasons," according to *The Washington Post*. The fact that the numbers being discussed are far less than the military's estimated need indicates that the surge is a political strategy, not a military one.

Even 50,000 more troops would be too few, however. The historical rule of thumb is a ratio of 50 civilians to 1 soldier in occupations. In the case of a counterinsurgency, leaving aside the civil war, "the United States and its allies in Iraq would need at least 500,000 and perhaps more than 1 million troops," military experts told *The Washington Post* in November.

Adding 20,000 troops would be a drop the bucket in Baghdad, the locus of any surge. The troops would complement the current force of 15,000 U.S. soldiers in

Baghdad. Going by the historical yardstick, if the United States really wanted to secure the capital, a city of 6.5 million, it would probably require 200,000 to 300,000 troops – more than all U.S. and foreign troops already in Iraq and any possible surge.

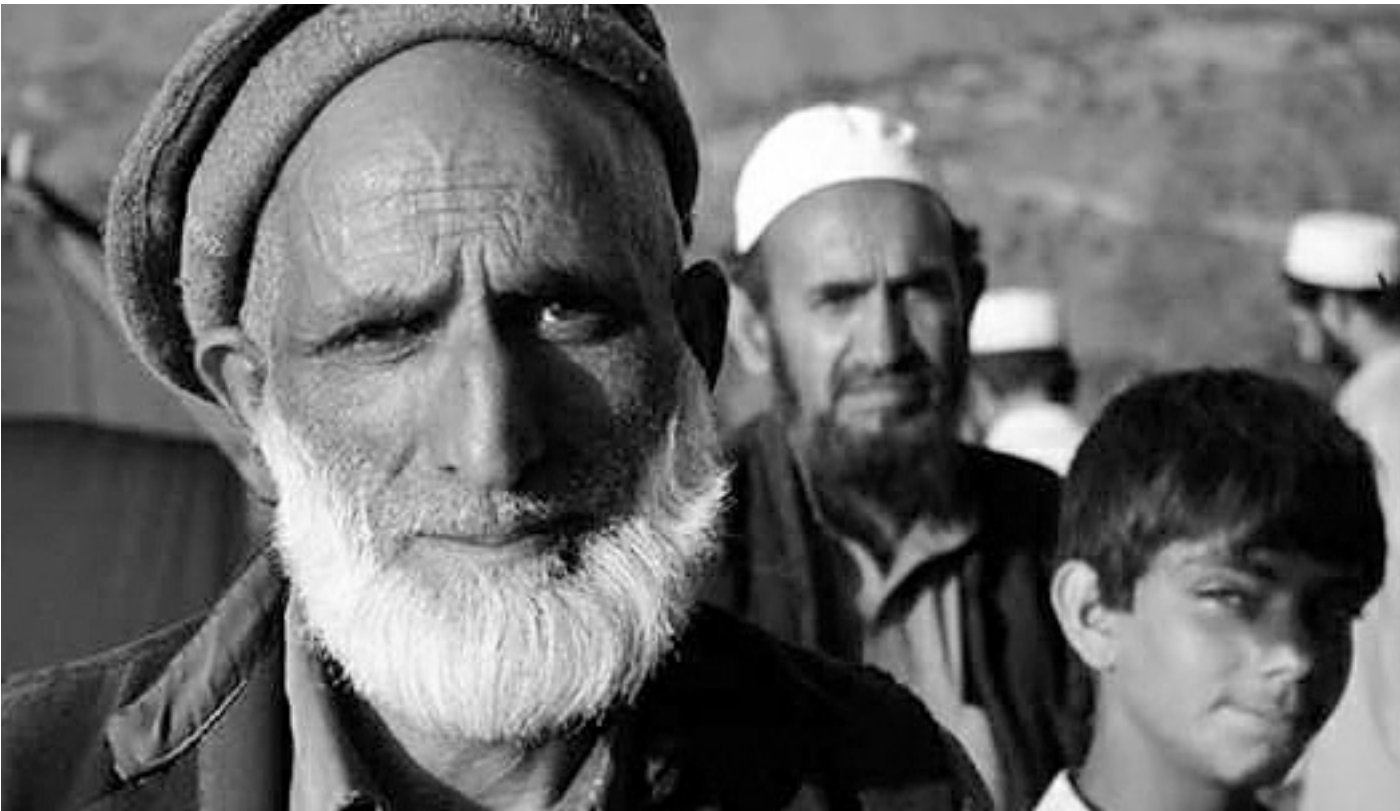
As for why the White House is grasping at the surge idea, the Joint Chiefs have told *The Washington Post* that they think it's due to limited alternatives. They argue it will be counter-productive because "a modest surge could lead to more attacks by al-Qaeda, provide more targets for Sunni insurgents and fuel the jihadist appeal for more foreign fighters to flock to Iraq." As for Shia militias, they "may simply melt back into society during a U.S. surge and wait until the troops are withdrawn – then reemerge."

Why pursue a doomed strategy? Because if the Bush administration were to cut its losses now, it would have to abandon the dream of remaking the Middle East through war. It would no longer have a large central base to pursue interventions against Iran or Syria. Thus, the next stage is escalation, which has been a constant of U.S. policy in Iraq. But it leaves the question, what will these extra troops do? Many plans have been put forth:

- **Concentrate on fighting the Sunni-led insurgency.** Al Anbar province alone could swallow up all the extra troops with no evidence that they would have an effect. About 40 percent of U.S. combat deaths take place in Anbar, and more troops may just mean more targets. Even if pressured in Anbar, resistance groups could shift operations to Baghdad and at least four other provinces where they have a strong base and wait out the surge.
- **Deploy the troops in Baghdad neighborhoods to stop the ethnic cleansing.** American troops would take up new positions in 23 mixed Shiite and Sunni neighborhoods to better protect the population. The main problem is that by the time troops are deployed, the communal cleansing may be completed. At least ten mixed neighborhoods in Baghdad have already been turned exclusively Shia at gunpoint.
- **Step up training of Iraqi troops.** This strategy has wide appeal, not because it will work, but because many Americans crave an honorable retreat. They believe that somehow sectarian, corrupt, ill-trained, poorly equipped Iraqi forces can defeat the insurgency and halt the civil war, after the most powerful military in the world has failed. Even if the Pentagon triples the advisors to 15,000, as the Iraq Study Group recommends, it won't matter. Some trainers say that all the U.S. military is doing is training and arming Iraqis to fight a looming civil war. Even if trained, most Iraqi troops desert. By one account 75 percent of Iraqi soldiers don't show up for duty. The root problem is that capable security forces depend upon a functional state, and Iraq's has no writ beyond the Green Zone.
- **Crush the Mahdi Army.** This is the likeliest option. While the Bush administration will probably try all the above, one of its policy constants is its desire to eliminate Sadr and his militia. Last spring, the White House blocked Ibrahim al-Jaafari from serving a second time as prime minister. Bush said he doesn't want, doesn't support, and doesn't accept him as prime minister because he felt Mr. Jaafari would do little to rein in Mr. Sadr.



April 6, 2004. Mourners carry a coffin of a guard killed the night before when US forces attacked the Muqtada Al-Sadr offices in the Shia neighborhood of Shualla. PHOTO: ANDREWSTERN.NET



Pashtun cultural independence has been preserved over thousands of years of invasions in part due to a strict code of behavior that dictates everything from everyday interactions and courtship to dress and the settlement of disputes. PHOTO: ALEX STONEHILL

Reflections from Pakistan

BY SARAH STUTEVILLE

I was in Pakistan for a little over a month last year reporting on the issue of bonded labor and debt slavery in the country. Though Pakistan was only one of the ten countries I visited in an eight-month tour, it looms the largest in my memory.

I was fascinated by this country so at odds with itself: as feudal as it is modern, as isolated from as it is harassed by the international community, as hospitable as it is hostile. But the real reason Pakistan is still on my mind is because America won't let me forget it.

At parties, family dinners and friendly reunions, I'm usually lucky to get a few moments of interest in my trip before eyes glaze over or people drop out to get another drink. But mention Pakistan and people are suddenly rapt. Instantly the bored "uh-huhs" become a barrage of "Ooooooh, Pakistan! Crazy! What was that like? Were they nice to you?" Which a few minutes later turns into the usual, "Were you afraid of getting kidnapped? Were there lots of guns?" and of course, "Did you have to wear the head thingy?"

The media are the same. I could pitch a story about women's empowerment movements in rural India or the struggling non-profit sector in Palestine until my last breath, but everything, everything I've written about Pakistan has been picked up and reprinted. I've been invited onto two radio programs and to at least one conference just because I reported there.

What makes Americans so hungry for a shocking little piece of what we most often see as an anarchic corner of the world full of crowded, dusty cities, oppressed women and angry men? What sort of anecdotes do we crave from that exotic vortex of terrorism, poverty and corruption? Are we looking — or hoping — for proof that the world is as dangerous and sinister as the TV images and frightening news reports would lead us to believe?

Shamefully, I too often oblige these perceptions. There's the story of being stoned by a group of taunting teenage boys in

Lahore, a nasty groping incident in Karachi, a couple of unhappy confrontations where I was denied entry at crucial moments in my reporting because I was a woman — or because I couldn't pay a bribe.

There was the day my translator basically quit because we were being trailed by the ISI (Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency), the ubiquitous guns, the desperate debt slaves, and of course, "the head thingy," the patched-together burka I had draped over myself throughout the trip, despite brutal temperatures that climbed beyond 105 degrees regularly. In short, I have plenty of material that could happily fuel and reinforce most American stereotypes of the country.

But the truth is, those are not the experiences I most often think of when I recall my time in Pakistan. The country most often comes back to me through the many moments that completely defy the stereotypes.

There were the regular clandestine political discussions, fueled by intellectual frustration, an endless supply of Will's Classic cigarettes and black-market liquor. It seemed that the ban on liquor, had—for a certain class of Pakistanis at least—made alcohol a requirement at any gathering of people interested in criticizing either the government or the Islamists (and most often both at the same time).

It wasn't just activists and academics that challenged my expectations. There was a quiet conversation with a young waiter at a downtown Lahore restaurant who dreamt of the gay clubs of New York City. There was a surprise serenade of "Show Me the Meaning of Being Lonely" in an alleyway café by a young man hard at work 60 hours a week in a call center — a spontaneous flirtation that became an instant friendship as he practiced his American accent on me (an accent he was developing so people in Texas and California wouldn't guess they were being assisted by a guy in Pakistan) and pondered whether Americans were doomed to be unhappy.

The feel of Pakistan's cities was unpredictable and complicated. One moment I'd

pass the empty lot of a recently burned-down Western restaurant, the next I'd see the bright lights of a Dunkin' Donuts advertising a sheesha (water pipe) and doughnut lunch special. I was turned away from a mosque with stern warnings and disapproving looks one morning, only to be asked into a Sufi shrine that night for an orgy of hash smoking, pounding drums and wild trances.

And there were the unlikely stories. The epic account of a guide who told me of stealing his sister's burka so he could sneak into the women-only park in Peshawar just "to be close to so many women at once." Or the women's studies major recounting tales of mockery and abuse while he tabled for gay and lesbian rights at Karachi University.

But back in America I'm wondering about our fixation with Pakistan. Why are Americans so obsessed with a country plagued by religious intrusions into politics? A country possessed by a violent gun culture and a ferociously entrenched patriarchy? A country whose development is stifled by a massive disparity between rich and poor, and whose leader is mired in an unpopular and unwinnable war? A country where cultures and expectations for the future clash at almost every turn? A country most often thought of in stereotypes by the rest of the world?

Maybe Pakistan intrigues us because it seems sort of familiar.

It's funny how easy it is to create an "other" when you're only willing to see the broad strokes. It's terrifying how getting a little closer, letting in the details, considering the small stories that make up a culture, and then revisiting those broad strokes feels like looking in the mirror. Maybe we fetishize Pakistan because it feels like a country that has taken our own problems to a frightening extreme.

I'm thankful for the opportunity to write this now. In part, I'm hoping that I'll redeem myself for all the times I cheaply sold out my experience in Pakistan to entertain and comfort self-satisfied Americans here at home. I won't let them, or myself, off the hook so easily in the future.

World briefs

ZAPATISTA MEETINGS
Over 1,000 people from 47 countries traveled to Chiapas to meet with members of autonomous, Zapatista-led communities on the 13th anniversary of their uprising against Mexico's central government. The wide-ranging meetings, which took place from Dec. 30-Jan. 2, gave visitors a glimpse into Zapatista-inspired "Councils of Good Governance." The councils, chosen in open assembly, have inaugurated schools in every village and regional center, health clinics, women's artesian cooperatives, and organic coffee cooperatives, according to *The Mexico Herald*.

'WAR ON TERROR' EXPANDS TO SOMALIA
Riots exploded in Somalia's capital of Mogadishu Jan. 6 against an edict by the country's new, U.S.-backed government that required residents to hand over their weapons. The government of Prime Minister Ali Mohammed Gedi was installed in late November by troops from neighboring Ethiopia. The weapons ban was subsequently postponed for an indefinite period of time. Ethiopia, with U.S. backing, invaded Somalia on Dec. 24 and quickly displaced Islamic militants who had been ruling the impoverished East African nation. The militants, many of whom melted into the civilian population, have vowed to fight an Iraq-style guerrilla war until foreign forces leave the country. On Jan. 7, the U.S. launched an airstrike against two alleged Al-Qaida leaders who had fled into southern Somalia. CBS News reported that "a lot of bodies were seen on the ground after the strike," but the victims' identities could not be confirmed.



VENEZUELA: "WE'RE HEADING TOWARD SOCIALISM"
Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez announced plans on Jan. 8 to nationalize Venezuela's telecommunications and electrical companies and ask for a constitutional amendment eliminating the autonomy of the Central Bank.

"We are in an existential moment of Venezuelan life. We're heading toward socialism, and nothing and no one can prevent it," said Chavez in his first speech of the year. Chavez, who is set to begin his third consecutive term, is taking steps to deepen what he calls a "socialist revolution." Since his landslide re-election in December, he has moved to unite Venezuela's ruling coalition into a single party. Chavez said he plans later this month to ask the National Assembly to extend his powers to legislate by presidential decree. His government has drawn criticism and accusations of censorship from the Organization of American States and Reporters Without Borders for recently refusing to renew the license of an opposition-allied television station that supported a 2002 coup against his government.

TOO HOT
2007 is predicted to be the hottest year on record, according to Britain's Meteorological Office. The prediction comes just weeks after scientists from the University of Ottawa revealed that the 41 sq. mile Ayles Ice Shelf had broken away from an island near the North Pole in August 2005. The ice shelf, which was 100 ft. thick and the size of roughly 11,000 football fields set off tremors picked up by earthquake monitors 155 miles away. By 2040, scientists are predicting the Arctic Ocean could experience totally ice-free summers.

PAN’S LABYRINTH, DIR. GUILLERMO DEL TORO
CHILDREN OF MEN, DIR. ALFONSO CUARON

Blunt Force Fantasies

Overcoming the navel-gazing dorkiness too often associated with their respective genres, the best sci-fi and fantasy films successfully tackle universal themes while simultaneously addressing contemporary issues. These films take the shape of imaginative parables, offering instructive lessons on the eternal here and now without slipping into didacticism. The end of 2006 produced two stellar new films in this tradition: Guillermo Del Toro’s horror-fantasy *Pan’s Labyrinth* and Alfonso Cuaron’s sci-fi thriller *Children of Men*. Shining through layers of dirt and blood with an all-too-relevant urgency, these visceral, brutal, gorgeous movies are not only two of the best films of 2006, but perhaps also the year’s most forcefully eloquent examples of politically engaged filmmaking.

It’s no accident that these exceedingly talented directors both made films this year set in not-too-distant eras of fascist rule. The post-WWII Franco-run Spain of *Pan’s Labyrinth* shows a village dominated by a general who slaughters innocent peasants in the name of suppressing insurgency. *Children of Men*’s Britain circa 2027 takes “homeland security” to its horrifyingly logical extreme, openly labeling its internment camps for immigrants with this tag. More concretely, both films depict worlds caught up in violent turmoil and revolt that’s made all the more palpable through each director’s tactile sense of pain. These movies bruise their audiences in the best possible way.

Del Toro’s film blends its two worlds of fantasy and reality so that they intersect and continually inform one another as the

directed it and enacted the title role. It is a fine work.

Set in the desolate landscape of Scranton in Pennsylvania’s coal country, *Wanda* tells the story of a nearly-homeless woman beset: young, attractive, friendless; unable to speak up for herself. “I’m no good,” she says, “I’m no good.” It’s not true, not true, but there is no one to intercede for her.

A leaf in the wind, a waif, Wanda wanders. She allows herself to be picked up and used by any man she encounters. Wanda gives up the custody of her two children to her husband, saying “They’ll be better off with him.” Loden portrays her tremulously, so sensitive she is to Wanda’s predicament, so feminine, so touching.

The film calls to mind *Gervaise*, starring Maria Schell, similarly responsive to the anti-heroine’s destiny; Rossellini’s *Germany Year Zero*, in which the central figure, an adolescent boy, finally commits suicide amidst the war ruins, and more recently, the victims of a pitiless violence in the Swedish and French films *Lily 4-Ever* and *Irreversible*. The final image of *Wanda* is Rembrandtian in its humanity and dark tones.

—DONALD PANETH

film progresses. While tending to her ill, pregnant mother amidst a violent conflict between local rebels and Franco’s army, young, book-obsessed Ofelia (Ivana Baquero) follows a peculiar dragonfly into a fantasy world where she meets an elaborately detailed faun, who in turn assigns her a series of tasks to assure her immortality as a princess. As Ofelia’s tasks become increasingly perilous, the dangers of the real world become even greater, with her murderous evil stepfather commanding the local doctor to sacrifice her mother to save his unborn child. All the while, said stepfather commands his troops to hunt down the rebels while he sadistically tortures those captured.

Far from the escapist realm it might appear to be at first, Ofelia’s fantasy world is filled with nightmarish images that echo those occurring in her village. It’s a credit to Del Toro that he never softens his story for a moment – both worlds are filthy, gory, harsh places, albeit beautifully rendered. Most importantly, the senseless murder and unspeakable violence that bridge them are keenly felt through the director’s evocative, unblinking stare. Unlike in *Apocalypto* or many recent horror films, death in *Pan’s Labyrinth* has an unmistakable impact.

This tendency to not look away from genuine horror carries into Cuaron’s film (he’s also a producer on Del Toro’s). But the horror on display in *Children of Men* proves even more upsetting than that of *Pan’s Labyrinth*, because it’s far too familiar. The world of 2027, or, as we see in an early news broadcast showing all other major cities aflame, the London that remains, is an infertile police state where immigrants are kept in internment camps and terrorist bombings occur with frequency. Theo (a perfectly cast Clive Owen) is the Bogart character, a former activist who, having suffered a horrific loss, has checked out and into a flask in his pocket. Contacted by his former lover Julian (Julianne Moore), now the leader of an underground political organization, Theo is assigned the task of escorting Kee, the first pregnant woman in 18 years, to the mysterious, possibly nonexistent Human Project.

The film follows their journey, as well as Theo’s reawakening, through a violent, war-torn landscape of unrest. The key to Cuaron’s stunning work here is twofold: detail and immediacy. Practically every background is filled with a politically charged image, as in the immigrant cages taken from Guantanamo, or the black hoods from Abu Ghraib. This is the most fully articulated vision of the future since *Blade Runner*, but for entirely different reasons – it is the nightmare of a Bush without term limits, of Iraq engulfing the globe. And as in *Pan’s Labyrinth*, every broken limb, gunshot and bomb shakes us to the core. Cuaron’s violence has a blistering poetic charge that’s most evident in two already-legendary, unbroken tracking shots that provide a gut-wrenching you-are-there immediacy.

Both films end with images of hope undercut with heartbreaking sadness, the right choice not only for their past and future stories, but for the present they so hauntingly reflect.

—CHARLIE BASS



The War Resisters League and the Brecht Forum present

SCREENPEACE

An Antiwar Film Festival

With a foreword by filmmaker John Sayles, **SCREENPEACE: AN ANTIWAR FILM FESTIVAL**, the War Resisters League 2007 Peace Calendar, looks at more than 50 antiwar films and videos from the last 20 years, from Hollywood blockbusters like *Syriana* to grassroots documentaries. This winter, see a rich selection of films and videos selected from the calendar at “Screenpeace: The Festival,” including:

FRI JAN 12 • 8PM Arlington West
The temporary “cemeteries in the sand” created by Veterans for Peace in California to honor the unacknowledged fallen U.S. soldiers of the war in Iraq and lament the cost of the war. Plus shorts including “A Nation Rocked to Sleep,” Carly Sheehan’s poem for her fallen brother.

FRI JAN 19 • 8PM Brother Outsider
The life of Bayard Rustin, the charismatic conscientious objector and civil-rights strategist who was the main organizer for the historic 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Justice.

FRI JAN 26 • 8PM Worlds Apart
The 2004 journey to Afghanistan by Ground Zero for Peace founder Megan Bartlett and other members of the antiwar 9-11 emergency workers’ group, and their meetings with their counterparts in Kabul.

THU FEB 1 • 8PM Men with Guns
John Sayles’ only Spanish-language film (so far), this is the story of one man’s belated political awakening: After his wife’s death, an aging doctor in an unnamed Latin American country goes on a quest for his legacy and finds, instead, his country’s legacy of violence.

FRI FEB 9 • 8PM The Camden 28
The draft board raids of the late ’60s and early ’70s were an attempt to stop the U.S. Selective Service from conducting business as usual and prefigured the Plowshares movement that followed. One such raid was planned in Camden, NJ, in August of 1971—and stopped by the FBI when a member of the planning group blew the whistle on the project. This is the story of the plan, the betrayal, the trial of the so-called conspirators, and its dramatic outcome.

FRI FEB 16 • 8PM The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It
The story of the conscientious objectors of World War II, many of whom, like Dave Dellinger, Bill Sutherland, and WRL’s own Ralph DiGia, spent the war years in prison—and radicalized the peace movement when they got out.

Plus discussions with filmmakers, heroes whose works are celebrated in the films, and other surprise guests, including one from the Paper Tiger series SHOCKING AND AWFUL, and WRL’s own MILITARY MYTHS.

FOR TICKETS, CALL (212) 228-0450.

For more information about the films being shown or to purchase the calendar, see **www.warresisters.org**.

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GOODBYE TO THE GODFATHER:

James Brown (1933 – 2006)

Dr. Martin Luther King was a James Brown fan.

In 1966, civil rights activist James Meredith – the first Black student at the University of Mississippi, admitted amid violent racist resistance four years before – was seriously wounded by a sniper after he embarked on a quixotic solo march through the state. Movement leaders vowed to complete the march, and Brown agreed to play a “freedom concert” at a Black college in Jackson.

The march marked a major split in the movement between King and the Baptist preachers, committed to nonviolent moral suasion, and the younger activists, such as Stokely Carmichael, who were raising the banner of “Black Power.” At an acrimonious meeting the night of the concert, King had had enough. “I’m sorry, y’all,” he announced. “James Brown is on. I’m gone.” (And he left with Carmichael.)

James Brown was a titanic talent, a creative avatar on the level of Louis Armstrong. How many musicians have been major figures in two genres (fifties R&B and soul), created another (funk), and indirectly fathered two more (hip-hop and Afro-beat, Nigerian Fela Kuti’s adaptation of Brown’s music)?

Brown began playing out in the 1950s in Georgia, where he often substituted for Little Richard, before scoring his first hit, “Please, Please, Please,” in 1956. Over the next several years, he built a reputation as “the hardest-working man in show business,” sweating off pounds at every show while leading a fiercely disciplined band (he was notorious for fining musicians for mistakes) on relentless tours of Southern chitlin-circuit clubs and the old vaudeville theaters of urban Black neighborhoods – including the legendary Apollo on 125th

Street, where he cut three live albums.

All this was a prelude to his work in the late sixties and early seventies. Beginning with “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag” in 1965 and evolving through “Cold Sweat” in 1967 and “Lickin’ Stick” in 1968, Brown invented funk, taking the boogaloo riddims of soul and turning every instrument into a virtual drum, creating a neo-African interplay of percussive horns, choppy bass and chanking guitar while exhorting the band to “take it to the bridge” or “give the drummer some.” This period also was his most commercially successful, with six pop Top Ten hits.

1968’s “I’m Black and I’m Proud” was a turning point. Over one of his funkier grooves yet, Brown shouted, “Say it loud!” and a children’s chorus chanted back, “I’m Black, and I’m proud.” (According to Brown’s autobiography, most of the kids were actually white or Asian.) The record would be his last pop Top Ten hit until 1985. Brown suspected that he’d been blacklisted by white corporate radio for being too militant; he also fell victim to the decline of the catholic, multiracial Top 40 radio of the ’60s and its replacement by segregated niche-market stations.

White radio slept through Brown’s most fecund period, the time of “Sex Machine,” “Get Up, Get Into It, Get Involved,” “The Payback,” and dozens more. From 1969 to 1974, he had 40 songs in the R&B Top Ten. These records not only exemplified funk: their beats (especially an instrumental called “Funky Drummer”) and Brown-inspired grooves by other artists provided the building blocks for the new music gestating in the South Bronx. It’s impossible to imagine old-school New York hip-hop – and that means it’s impossible to imagine hip-hop, period – without James Brown.

Aside from his indirect influence, Brown’s records were the music for crucial tracks by Public Enemy, Eric B. and Rakim and Spoonie Gee.

“I used to shine shoes in front of a radio station. Now I own radio stations. That’s Black Power,” Brown said during a televised show in Boston the night after Dr. King was murdered. But his entrepreneurial vision led to his stupidest political move: endorsing Richard Nixon for re-election in 1972. The resultant boycott cut attendance at some of his shows by more than 80 percent. Brown said he was motivated by Nixon’s support for “Black capitalism”; it was also rumored that the endorsement, like that of future Yankees owner George Steinbrenner, was a quid pro quo to get the IRS off his back. (If that story is true, then Nixon double-crossed Brown; within a year, the IRS would dun him for \$4.5 million in alleged back taxes.)

Brown’s career declined after the mid-’70s; there wasn’t much room for raw funk in the era of slick, bland disco and corporate-payola radio. He eventually achieved elder-statesman status, with a four-CD box set (*Star Time*), props from the hip-hoppers who sampled him and music geeks lionizing his once-faceless supporting cast – Clyde Stubblefield, the getting-wicked “Funky Drummer” and Jimmy Nolen, who developed the polyrhythmic chank that defined funk guitar. But Brown didn’t handle it well; his latter years were marked by a succession of arrests for domestic violence and drug-fueled car chases.

Still, Brown’s legacy is unstoppable. Last summer, I was in the subway when I heard an unmistakable James Brown groove, a track from the 1967 *Live at the Apollo Vol. 2* album. Nearly 40 years old,

it sounded fresher and livelier than anything else around.

There was a dance

They call the jerk

Everybody relax

And watch me work.



letters to the editor

continued from page 2

SHED LIGHT ON THE CRIMINALITY OF WAR

Your brother did it because he could and, from what you say, appeared to be proud of his actions. Why else show it to his friends? Regardless of whether you’re a soldier in a war zone or not, it is wrong and many soldiers would not be a part of what your brother did, so you can’t blame the war, the army, the situation for everything. He needs help and you are in a position to help him, heartbreaking though the results might be, and by becoming public, you could also shed light on the criminality of war, standards for enlistment, lack of oversight, and gross negligence in the field.

—ACT NOW!

A BROTHER’S KEEPER

Most wars (and warlords) thrive on ignorance and prey on the young. Young soldiers are the most physically fit for service and still do not have the life experience necessary to create their own set of beliefs based on a full life experience that will prevent them from committing these types of acts. Do not blame your brother. That’s just war. There is no fair or antiseptic war. It’s always men doing horrible things to each other. He will have to confront his demons on his own time and in his

own way. You are part of your brother’s basic circle of existence. Give him the one thing you can, and that nobody else can, which is your love free of prejudice. Eventually (probably a long process) he will come around, and he will need you and your family more than ever.

—TOMAS

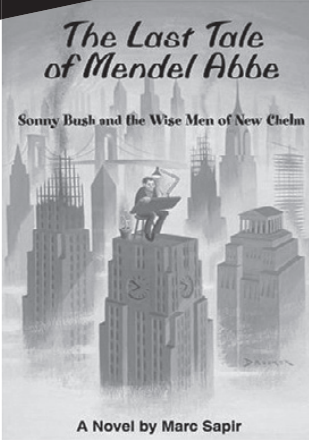
AUTHOR’S REPLY:

I recognize that people are outraged and should be. It oftentimes gets directed at the wrong person. I don’t identify with the left anymore because I find many use real lives to feed their self-righteousness. Most leftists – those that I have encountered, and that’s been quite a few – don’t have any huge moral dilemmas or find themselves in the grey area. I am outraged too, but conflicted in so many other ways for which you have no understanding. If you need to know, I don’t have any guilt or feel “blood on my hands” because I refuse to throw my brother in jail. I am so much closer to the war in a different way than most people are. You wouldn’t believe the different layers there are. It consumes you. But, we all do feel it somehow. This is all totally fucked up, but I don’t think throwing soldiers in jail is going to work. We have to get to the root of all this, otherwise it turns into a witch hunt.

—LEAH LARSON

Disappeared in 2003, Mendel Abbe was one of the first victims of the revised U.S. Homeland State apparatus. His satire on Sonny Bush et al had become an intolerable irritant—to say nothing of his pseudo-Chelmic immigrant status.

The Last Tale of Mendel Abbe
Sonny Bush and the Wise Men of New Chelm
BY MARC SAPIR



Andrea Lewis, KPFA-Berkeley’s morning show co-host and culture guru said of this novel: “I didn’t read it, but look Marc, it’s not political enough to be discussed on our show.” A dozen other KPFA programmers in political affairs and culture bested that, ignored their free copies with the adroit finesse of silence usually signifying the “real” Media.

Now you too can ignore this book
available from iUniverse.com and amazon.com

But on the other hand...San Francisco’s communist street beat poet and current official Poet Laureate, Jack Hirshman, writes: “Many laughs, recognitions and delights in the text...and the satiric level is also suggestive...the self-conscious narrator is a fine turn in the narrative. I congratulate you for it. It’s very inventive.” And LA Green Integer Publisher Doug Messerli gasps: “I truly love your little novel. It reads splendidly, and was quite delightful.” Black Oaks Bookstore employee and event master, Louis Clausner, had the temerity to compare Sapis’s writing to Philip Roth and Thomas Pynchon. Go figure. It’s a sleeper. \$12.95



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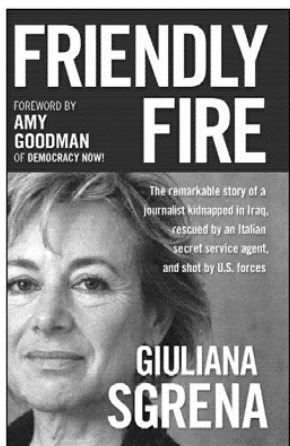
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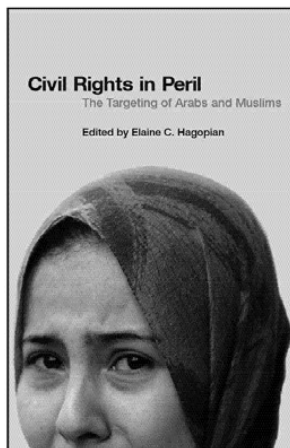
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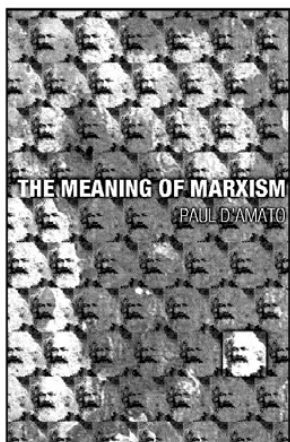
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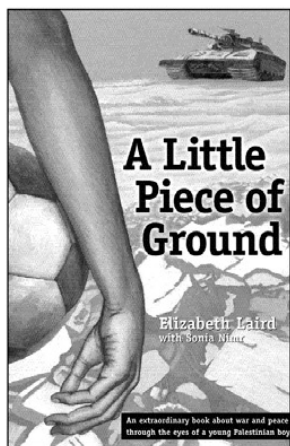


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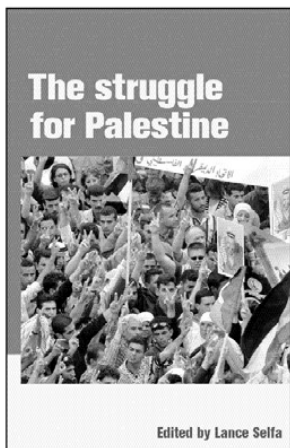
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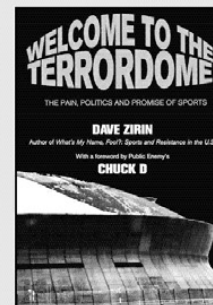
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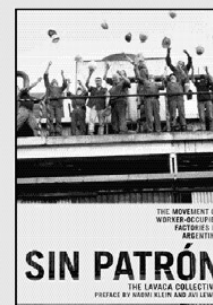
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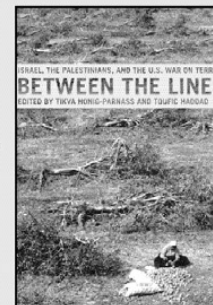
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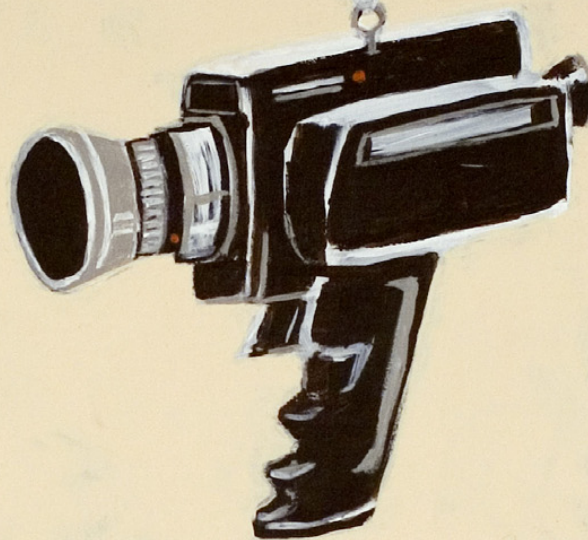
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